

BETWEEN MALACHI
AND SAINT MATTHEW

Preface by
CANON
W. BENHAM

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Central BAPTIST
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Between Malachi
and
Saint Matthew



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Between Malachi and Saint Matthew

A SIMPLE HISTORY OF THE FIVE CENTURIES
BEFORE THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

BY

GEORGIANA M. FORDE

~~AUTHOR OF "A GOODLY HERITAGE," "CHRIST THE KING OF LOVE"~~

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WITH PREFACE BY THE REV.

CANON BENHAM, D.D.

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Preface.

No one who observes the signs of the times will question that very great interest is being taken at this moment in the history and interpretation of the Bible. There are critics hostile, sceptical, doubtful, hopeful; there are pious souls lamenting that the faith of men seems shaken, and that the foundations are out of course. I desire at once to express my calm conviction and certainty that all this questioning will result in good. The Lord reigneth over all, and will turn even hostility to His praise; and all enquiry conducted in a candid, humble, earnest spirit, with a remembrance of the solemn issues at stake, and faith in the sure guidance of God, must bring a blessing.

I have acceded to the request that I would write a short Preface to this little volume, because I am sure that the subject is one which will help readers to a deeper and fuller knowledge concerning the earthly life of our Lord and the foundation of His Church. For let us consider even slightly the structure, as one may call it, of the Holy Volume. We have a connected, consecutive history of the chosen people, their division into two monarchies, the disappearance of the one, the captivity of the other, and its restoration to Judæa after seventy years. But the

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accounts of that restoration are very scanty and not easy to follow, owing to the construction of the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah. We get some further light on the period from the writings of three prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Four hundred years pass, and we open the New Testament. During that interval the chosen people of the ancient Covenant has gone through wonderful changes, as indeed the world has during the same time. Herod is King of the Jews, ruling them in subordination to the authority of the Roman Empire, which is now the mistress of the world, from the Euphrates to the Strait of Gibraltar, from the Danube to the great African Desert. The current language of the general world is not Hebrew, nor Latin, but Greek. As far as our general reading goes all this has come about silently. Rome is not once mentioned in the Old Testament, and Greece not before the Book of Daniel. You have it alluded to in the Book of Isaiah and some of the Psalms as "the isles of the sea," and that is all. Once more, you have priests and prophets in the Church of the Old Testament; in the days of Herod the King, there is the Temple, and there are the priests, but who are the Pharisees and Sadducees, who take so prominent a place in the scenes of our Lord's life? There is no mention of them before. The Canonical Scriptures of the Old Testament were all written in Hebrew, those of the New Testament, let them be addressed to whatever people they may, are all in Greek.

The following volume will tell how this amazing silent

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revolution was brought about, how Almighty God was not only bringing on the fulfilment of the Hebrew types and prophecies of the ages past, but was also leading the Gentiles to the light which was to come upon the earth. Socrates and Plato, the Greek sages, were teaching truths which they felt, but dimly understood, concerning the immortality of the soul and a Divine Wisdom which was speaking to men, and the preparation was going on for the focussing of their teaching in the Divine Incarnation, when the fulness of this time should come. Babylon fell, the Empire of the ancient East; victory over it was the victory of Greek intellectualism and learning; that in turn fell before the superior organisation, discipline, method, of the Roman Imperialism. But the Greek influence lived on and was mighty. Its language became the language, for the time being, of the world; not only the four Gospels, but all the Epistles—even that to the Romans—were written in Greek. It was a profound saying of the great Napoleon, that the triumph of Christianity was the victory of Greece over Rome. How the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek is told in the following pages. S. Paul was God's chosen vessel called to bring the civilisation, and learning, and aspirations of the Gentile world into obedience to the law of the Son of David. And Rome in its turn did the work to which Divine Providence called it, when its military and social organisations conveyed the Christian Creeds, which had grown up in Jewish and Greek soil, into the furthest recesses of the Empire.

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Before sending the reader to the volume before me, to learn how the great changes were brought about, let me illustrate one point on which I have already thrown out some hints—I mean the influence of the Greek world in the preparation for the gospel—by reference to two books of the Apocrypha. That called *The Wisdom of Solomon* is the work of a Greek who has read the Hebrew Scriptures, and has been deeply stirred and taught by them, whilst he has also drunk deep of the teaching of Plato. The two lessons which are read as lessons for All Saints' Day concerning the hopes of the righteous in the eternal world are deeply Platonic, but they are also based upon a belief in the Unity of God which Plato had not taught, but the Hebrew prophets had. The book of *Ecclesiasticus* is the work of a Jew, who had read and admired the lives of great men outside his own nation, and has come, one may say, within measurable distance of the gospel truth, when it shall please God to reveal it to him. The late Dean Plumptre, with characteristic ingenuity, expressed the opinion that *Ecclesiasticus* was written by Apollos at the time when he “knew only the baptism of John,” and that after he had been taught the truth of God more perfectly, he wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews. I feel that I must call this a guess, but I confess that there seems to me a good deal of probability in it. The other books of the Apocrypha have their own interest, the protest against the idolatry of the Eastern nations contained in the fiction of Bel and the Dragon, the covert incentive to resist the Syrian tyranny in that of Judith

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where the Syrian king is disguised as Holofernes, the ridicule cast upon the magical arts in Tobit, as well as the setting forth of a beautiful picture of family life, all these make the books of the Apocrypha well worth study, whilst we also realise to the full the declaration of the Sixth Article that the Church doth not apply these books to the establishment of any doctrine.

I began by referring to the controversies which are so busy amongst us, I return to them for a minute longer. Social and economical theories have been raised, and we are faced with serious problems about the future of our national life. It was really a good sign, a mark of reverence and trust, that some of the most busy of the "Social Reformers" made much of the preaching of Christ, and claimed Him on their side. But their method has had its drawback. They dwelt on His human life and His teachings of the multitude, and ignored what besides is told us, His Divine Incarnation, the foretellings of the prophets and the comments of the glorious company of the apostles. That omission has for a while, I fear, strengthened Socinianism, the Personality of Christ with its Eternal Foundation left out. I have thought, as I read the following sheets, that they will help earnest souls to see how the Old Testament and the New are one, the revelation of the love of God for His world from the beginning. God grant it, for Christ's sake.

WILLIAM BENHAM.

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INTRODUCTION.

MOST of us, sometime or other in our lives, as we finished reading the last verses of the book of Malachi, with its stern warnings and prophecies, and then turned over the leaf, and in the opening lines of St. Matthew's Gospel read the loved familiar name of JESUS CHRIST, have marvelled at the sudden transition from dimness into sunlight, and sought vainly for some link to bridge over the chasm, some light to clear up the intervening mists, and show what happened between these two broadly separated epochs; the Apocrypha, of course, is the best illuminator, but that, alas, is generally now not bound up with our Bibles.

Yet that interval of about five hundred years was a most stirring one in the world's history, and the Jews had their part in it. Old things were passing away, great empires were overthrown, new ideas revolutionized mankind, and over and through all the great King of all the earth, the Lord Who sitteth above the water-floods, was preparing the nations for the Coming of His Son "in the fulness of time."

Very puzzled have we been, too, when reading our New Testament, to find the depravity of the

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priests generally, but especially the high priests, the very men whom we expected to be the devout leaders of their people ; this little book will show how this came to pass, as the high priesthood gradually became more a political than a sacred office, more envied as a source of wealth and power, than as a spiritual dignity.

The origin and growth of the Scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees are also noted here as well as that of the Roman power which finally destroyed the Jews as a nation. In these and other ways it is hoped that "Between Malachi and Saint Matthew" may prove a real help and interest to the many who long to gain wider knowledge of anything that may throw light on those Holy Scriptures which alone can make us "wise unto salvation."

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CHAPTER I.

“Thou shalt arise and have mercy upon Sion: for it is time that Thou have mercy on her, yea, the time is come.”

Cyrus—The Apocrypha—Babylon—The Return from the Captivity—The Altar of Burnt Offerings Restored—Foundation Stone of the Temple Laid.

ABOUT five hundred years before the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, a noble warrior king, named Cyrus, became ruler of the gigantic Persian Empire, the country from which the wise men of whom we read in the second chapter of S. Matthew's Gospel, are supposed to have come.

There is a great deal about this king in the Bible: we read of him by name in four different books: in the second book of Chronicles, in Ezra, in the last half of the book called Isaiah, and in Daniel. In one verse God says of Cyrus, “He is My shepherd that shall perform all My pleasure, even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.”

This is what actually happened. In the very first year of his reign, he published a proclamation that

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astonished the whole of his great dominions. It was nothing less than a permission for all exiles to return to their own homes!

You may see if you like with your own eyes the very cylinder on which the decree was written, for it is with us now in London, one of the many rich treasures preserved in the British Museum. It looks rather the size and colour of a roly-poly suet pudding, only that all round the baked clay are the marks of the curious Babylonian writing which was stamped on it twenty-five centuries ago, causing intense joy to thousands of people; for the news it contained was so unlike other conquerors' decrees.

What had been the usual custom of an Eastern monarch in those old days of cruelty and hard-heartedness was this:—The victor, after subduing a nation, took away for ever, to his own country, thousands of its principal inhabitants as prisoners and slaves; giving their deserted cities and villages as rewards to his friends.

Then was bitter weeping and wailing as the poor creatures were torn by their oppressors from their beloved homes, never to see them again; the feeble ones among them who would not be able to bear the long fatiguing march, being killed before their eyes. In the thirty-first chapter of Jeremiah, we read a pitiful account of what actually had taken place, perhaps even more than once, when the gangs of captives were being marshalled for their long journey to a foreign land.

Of course, the Rahel mentioned there refers to Rachel, Jacob's beautiful wife, who was buried at

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Ramah, which means "heights," at Bethlehem, and was the mother of the tribe of Benjamin. She is represented as weeping for the agony of her oppressed descendants; and St. Matthew, in the second chapter of his Gospel, supposes her weeping also for the cruel murder by King Herod, at the time of the Saviour's birth, of all the babies in Bethlehem "from two years old and under"; the Innocents as our Church calls them.

Almighty God had allowed His chosen people, the Jews, to be banished as a punishment for their terrible sins. You know the children of Israel came out of Egypt, as twelve tribes, descended from the twelve sons of Jacob. First, the ten tribes were carried off by a fierce king, and, it is believed, they eventually got so mixed up with the strange people among whom they lived, that hardly any trace of them is now to be found. Two hundred years later the other two tribes composing the Jewish nation, that is, Judah and Benjamin, who had refused to take warning by their kinsmen's fate, and to forsake their evil ways, suffered the same punishment.

God allowed them to be conquered by the mighty Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, of whom we read much in the Bible. You will find him mentioned in the second book of Kings, in the second book of Chronicles, in Ezra, Nehemiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

It was Nebuchadnezzar who thrust those three Jewish lads into the burning fiery furnace, because they would not fall down and worship the huge golden idol which he had set up. We still sing

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in Church their hymn of thankfulness on their miraculous deliverance; it is called the *Benedicite* in our Prayer Books. "O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord," are its opening words. It is taken out of a book called "The Song of the Three Children," which forms part of the Apocryphal chapters of the book of Daniel. Nowadays most Bibles are printed omitting the Apocrypha; that is, without the fourteen books which ought to be found between the Old and New Testaments. This is a great pity, and you should never buy a Bible that has left out the Apocrypha, for then it is not a complete Bible. You can always buy the perfect Bible at the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

It is quite true that the Church does not use these fourteen books to establish any doctrine, but as our Prayer Book tells us in the sixth Article of Religion, they are "read for example of life and instruction of manners." Perhaps it is the name Apocrypha which frightens people. They think it means *untrue*—it means no such thing—"little known" or "hidden" is the right explanation of the word. Neither our Lord nor His apostles thought lightly of the Apocrypha, there are several quotations in the New Testament from it, and our Church has appointed thirty-six lessons to be read out of it during each year. Most beautiful are some of these. That for the morning of All Saints' Day has comforted many and many a mourner. It is taken from the beginning of the third chapter of the book called the Wisdom of Solomon.

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"But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them.

"In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die: and their departure is taken for misery.

"And their going from us to be utter destruction: but they are in peace.

"For though they be punished in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality.

"And having been a little chastized, they shall be greatly rewarded; for God proved them and found them worthy for Himself."

Then if "faith healers" and "Christian Scientists" so called, would only take the advice given them in the first lesson for the evening of St. Luke's Day, when we commemorate "the beloved physician," they would not get into trouble for breaking the laws of their land, but would find that their prayers *and* the doctor's skill had both their place in a sick person's cure. The lesson is taken from the thirty-eighth chapter of Ecclesiasticus.

"Honour a physician with the honour due unto him for the uses which ye have of him; for the Lord hath created him.

"For of the most High cometh healing, and he shall receive honour of the king.

"The Lord hath created medicines out of the earth, and he that is wise will not abhor them.

"My son, in thy sickness be not negligent: but pray unto the Lord, and He will make thee whole.

"Then give place to the physician, for the Lord hath created him: let him not go from thee, for thou hast need of him.

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"There is a time when in their hands there is good success.

"For they shall also pray unto the Lord, that He would prosper that, which they give for ease and remedy to prolong life."

The Apocrypha also helps us to understand better many passages of the Old Testament. For instance, we read in the thirty-third chapter of the second book of Chronicles about that wicked king Manasseh, who was not only bad himself, but made Judah and Jerusalem to sin. "And God spake to Manasseh and his people, and they would not hearken. Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the hosts of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon. And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto Him; and He was entreated of him and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom."

To the Apocrypha we must turn for the words of that earnest confession, "The Prayer of Manasses, King of Judah, when he was holden captive in Babylon," as it is called. It is full of strong faith and true contrition. "Thou, O Lord, according to Thy great goodness, hast promised repentance and forgiveness to them that have sinned against Thee: and of Thine infinite mercies hast appointed repentance unto sinners, that they may be saved. I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned and I acknowledge mine iniquities; wherefore I humbly beseech Thee

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forgive me, O Lord, forgive me, and destroy me not with mine iniquities. For Thou art the God, even the God of them that repent; and in me Thou wilt shew all Thy goodness: for Thou wilt save me, that am unworthy, according to Thy great mercy." These are a few sentences out of that beautiful prayer of an awakened sinner.

It is from the Apocrypha, too, that we chiefly know what happened to the Jews from the death of the Prophet Malachi to the birth of Saint John Baptist, so that though not as holy as the New Testament, it is a very valuable part of the Bible.

But to return to Nebuchadnezzar. Having conquered the Jews, and having put out the eyes of the treacherous Zedekiah, governor or vassal king of Jerusalem, he sent him to Babylon in fetters of brass, and there he died in prison; Ezekiel's words in his twenty-eighth chapter being thus literally fulfilled, "I will bring him to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there."

The nation of the Jews was carried away during various years as prisoners to Babylon. Among the most famous of the captives were Ezekiel, and Daniel with his companions. Only the very poor of the land were left in Palestine.

Intensely astonished must the sad Jews have been at their first sight of Babylon, which was by far the grandest city of the world. The description of it seems like a fairy tale, as we read it in the pages of Herodotus, the famous traveller. His visit to Babylon occurred less than a hundred years after the

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Jews left the place ; and others besides him have described its marvels.

So huge was the city, that it contained forests parks and plains inside its walls. These walls were from forty to sixty miles round, and about three hundred feet high, and on the top of them was a broad terrace, on which a chariot with four horses could easily turn round.

The king's palace had three walls round it, the outside one being seven miles long, and they enclosed the famous hanging gardens, which had been made to please the wife of Nebuchadnezzar, who in flat Babylon had pined for the hills and vales of the far-away land where she had been brought up.

Most famous of all was the temple of the Babylonian idol Bel ; it was situated in the very centre of the city, and was built square upon square ; its base was two hundred yards, and the gigantic mass of brickwork is said to have reached the height of six hundred feet ! Its several tiers were each painted a different colour ; first black, then orange, red, gold, dark yellow, blue, and finally at the top was the silver chapel, which contained the golden idol ; perhaps the very one that was set up in the plain of Dura, and to which the noble Jewish youths refused to bow. Tradition says that the image was forty feet high !

The houses in this wonderful city were built of three or four stories, and the hundred gates set in its walls were all of solid brass.

It must all have looked so unhomelike to the poor

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Jewish captives; the hot, flat country was utterly unlike their beautiful hills and valleys, and rushing streams, and varied scenery. No wonder that we read of this period in the hundred and thirty-seventh Psalm: "By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept, when we remembered thee, O Sion. As for our harps, we hanged them up; upon the trees that are therein. For they that led us away captive required of us then a song, and melody in our heaviness: Sing us one of the songs of Sion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"

The Jews had been warned over and over again that this calamity would fall on them on account of their wickedness, but our God is ever the loving Father Who, though obliged to punish, rejoices in mercy; and He also gave them the comforting promise that after seventy years He would bring them again to their own beloved land.

And now the long penance was over, and two great lasting lessons had been learnt from it; one was the earnest looking forward to the Messiah, or Christ, Whom their prophets had foretold; and the other was their utter abhorrence of idolatry, for never again, as a people, do we hear of their giving way to it, they had seen too much in that heathen land of the horrors of idol worship. Thus the great foundation truth of the Christian, as well as of the Jewish, religion had been mastered, namely, that there is but one God, and a great step gained in preparing the way for our Lord Jesus Christ's coming "in the fulness of time."

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The Gentile exiles (all who were not Jews) might well wonder and try to find political reasons for this gracious proclamation of King Cyrus (who had conquered and was reigning over Nebuchadnezzar's realm), but the Jews knew well that Almighty God, Who alone can dispose and turn the hearts of kings as it seems best to His godly wisdom, had brought about this event to fulfil His promise; and, moreover, had moved Cyrus to show them special favour, encouraging the rebuilding of their Temple and restoring to them the beautiful gold and silver vessels that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away and put in the house of his gods.

We know the exact number the Jews took back with them, for it is all written down in the first chapter of the book of Ezra and in the second chapter of the first book of Esdras in the Apocrypha, where we read of the thousand cups of gold, and the thousand of silver, and, among other things, the twenty-nine sacrificial knives; the total amount being over five thousand four hundred.

It was in the springtime, 537 years before Christ, that the Jews started on their long homeward march of about six hundred miles, and it took them between four and five months to accomplish.

We cannot be sure how many left Babylon. The Bible says forty-two thousand; but then we do not know whether this means counting every soul, or only the heads of families; if the latter, the returning exiles must have numbered very many more thousands. Anyhow, of this we are certain,

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namely, that numbers were left behind in Babylon who had married and settled down there, and prospered in business, and so did not wish to return. These, however, helped their brethren with rich gifts for the Temple and its services.

Cyrus sent also a thousand of his soldiers to defend the travellers from attacks on the road, which then (as now) was infested with ferocious hordes of robbers ; and also to enable them to take possession of their own land of Judea.

Only natural was it that the Jews affectionately remembered King Cyrus as a true benefactor. He was a great monarch, and when he died his body was put into a gold coffin, and deposited in a magnificent tomb, thirty-six feet high, surrounded by cloisters of white marble. If you ever go to Persia, you may still see his monument, but you will not be surprised to hear that not a trace of the gold coffin is visible!

The journey back to Palestine might be very long and dangerous, but no thoughts of peril or fatigue were allowed to cloud the brightness of the return from the captivity. "Forth from the gates of Babylon they rode to the sound of joyous music—a band of horsemen playing on flutes and tabrets accompanied by their own two hundred minstrel slaves, and one hundred and twenty singers of the Temple."

They were going back to the Holy Land, to the Holy City, as from henceforth Palestine and Jerusalem were named: they themselves at this time received the new name of Jews, or men of

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Judea, instead of being called Israelites or Hebrews as of old.

“When the Lord turned the captivity of Sion; then were we like unto them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter and our tongue with joy; then said they among the heathen, the Lord hath done great things for them.” This hundred and twenty-sixth Psalm, as well as the hundred and thirty-sixth (which ends every one of its twenty-seven verses with the exulting words, “for His mercy endureth for ever”), with many other Psalms, are believed to have been written for this joyous event.

The route they took was afterwards known by the name of the Royal Road. It led first by the banks of the great River Tigris, past the mounds of the desolate city Nineveh, destroyed just sixty-eight years before. We read a great deal about this place in the book of Jonah, who was sent with a message from God to bid it repent and turn from its wickedness. He did not like the task, and tried to escape it by taking a sea voyage, and then all his troubles came on him, for no one can be happy who goes against God.

The second time God gave him the command to preach, he obeyed, and went “into the city, a day’s journey; and he cried, and said, Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.” The king arose from his throne and clothed himself in sackcloth, and sat in ashes, and he and all the people fasted and prayed. “And God saw their works that they turned from their evil way: and God repented of

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the evil that He said He would do unto them, and He did it not."

For one hundred years after Jonah's preaching, Nineveh was spared, and indeed became very powerful ; we do not know what brought her terrible fate on her, most likely it was her sins, but we are not told.

On the travellers went, every step bringing them nearer to the Land of Promise. How they must have rejoiced when they caught the first glimpse of snow-clad Mount Hermon, and burst forth with the words of the hundred and twenty-first Psalm, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills : from whence cometh my help. My help cometh even from the Lord : Who hath made heaven and earth. The Lord shall preserve thy going out, and thy coming in : from this time forth for evermore."

The returning emigrants were under the authority of a council of twelve chiefs ; who were called the "elders of the Jews." Head over all was Zerubbabel, a descendant of King David, and next to him was Joshua, the high priest, a descendant of Aaron.

At last they reached Jerusalem—a sight which might almost have made them despair, had not their hearts been filled with hope and praise, for she lay desolate, a heap of ruins !

The first thing they had to do was to build shelters for themselves, but when this was done, Zerubbabel lost no time in restoring the great altar of burnt offering on the same holy spot that even then possessed long centuries of hallowed memories.

It is generally believed to be the place where

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Abraham offered up Isaac ; and where about eight hundred years later, stood the threshing-floor of Araunah, the Jebusite, where the Angel of Death was stayed by God's command, when, on account of David's sin, a great pestilence was afflicting his people. " And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the Angel of the Lord stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. And David built there an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt offerings, and peace offerings, and called upon the Lord : and He answered him by fire upon the altar of burnt offering. And the Lord commanded the Angel : and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof."

A few years later and the beautiful Temple of David's son, King Solomon, was built there ; and now in this most sacred place, Zerubbabel in faith and hope again reared up an altar to the true God. Henceforth there was once more seen ascending to the sky the columns of smoke morning and evening from the daily sacrifice, the type of the Saviour the Lamb of God, the one true perfect sacrifice that would be offered on the Cross of Calvary for the sins of the whole world.

It is terrible to think that at the present time this most holy ground is in the hands of those who do not believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, and a Mohammedan mosque occupies the place of the Temple of the Lord !

Zerubbabel's next great work, after restoring the altar for sacrifices, was to prepare material for the

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rebuilding of the Temple itself—the House of God which should be a centre of attraction to all Jews wherever scattered in the wide world. The money and gifts they had brought with them from Babylon, enabled them to hire masons and carpenters, and secure cedar-trees from Lebanon for the woodwork : stone could be got from the quarries close at hand.

The day of laying the foundation stone was a time of the utmost rejoicing and solemnity. The priests appeared again in their beautiful garments, sounding the silver trumpets, and the Levites with cymbals, “Sang together by course praising and giving thanks unto the Lord ; because He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the House of the Lord was laid.”

But many of the priests and Levites, and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men that had seen the first House, when the foundation of this House was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice ; and many shouted aloud for joy : so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people : for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

No wonder the ancient men wept. Where was the ark with the mercy-seat in which were stored the pot of manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded and bloomed blossoms and yielded almonds ? (Read Numbers xvii.)

Where was the holy fire which came down from

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heaven at the dedication of Solomon's Temple (2 Chronicles vii.) to the altar of burnt-offering and consumed the sacrifices, and by which all the burnt-offerings were presented? For about five hundred years the priests had kept this holy fire from being extinguished, right up to the time that the nation was carried captive to Babylon.

The breastplate of the high priest, containing the mysterious Urim and Thummin, that we read of in Exodus xxviii. and Numbers xxvii., was missing: so was the holy oil that Moses made and which was kept up most carefully for the anointing of kings and high priests and the sacred vessels of the sanctuary—all these were gone for ever.

It seemed as if priceless treasures had been lost by the captivity; among them the Jews' own independence as a nation. Henceforth they were always a subject people, except for a very short time. Persia claimed their allegiance for two hundred years, then Greece, and last of all the Romans. But God rules over everything, and the mission of the Jewish Church was to prepare mankind for the Saviour's coming. The Jews could not have done this as long as they remained a retired self-centred little state; but when by fighting in the armies of their masters, or by their various captivities, or through trade, for the Jews were then as now, mighty merchant princes, all this was changed, and they became scattered throughout Europe, Asia, and Africa. You can see this from the long list of countries mentioned in the second chapter of Acts: the places from which Jews came

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to attend the Feast of Pentecost just after our Lord's Ascension.

It is reckoned that one-seventh of the vast Roman Empire (which meant the whole civilised world at the time of our Lord's Birth) were Jews, either by birth or as proselytes to the Jewish Church: a mighty multitude, who by their religion and study of their sacred Scriptures, were, unknowingly to themselves, working out God's plans of making ready a people prepared for the Lord and for the spread of the Christian Church He was coming to found.

The ancient men need therefore not have mourned; indeed, their nation's power for good had marvellously widened by those sad years of exile: and this new Temple of which they had just laid the foundation-stone was to have transcendent honour, for it was to receive within its courts Him Who was the Desire of all nations, even the Son of God, the Saviour of the world.

CHAPTER II.

“O what great troubles and adversities hast Thou shewed me, and yet didst Thou turn and refresh me.”

**The Samaritans hinder the Building of the Temple—
Darius Hystaspes—Haggai and Zechariah—The
Temple Finished — Malachi and Esther — Ezra,
Scribes, and Synagogues — Samaritans destroy
Jerusalem Fortifications.**

THE news that the Jews had laid the foundation-stone of their Temple was soon spread abroad, and the Samaritans, whose territory lay a little north of Judea, now came and requested to be allowed to take a part in the glorious work of rebuilding God's House.

They were a mixed race of people, chiefly descended from the foreign colonists who were placed in the deserted cities when the ten tribes had been carried away captive, but a few of them were descendants of the Israelites.

They believed in the True God, and yet at the same time used idolatrous rites, and for this reason their request was refused, rightly perhaps, but certainly more abruptly than it ought to have been. In the fourth chapter of Ezra we read “Zerubbabel

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and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God ; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the King of Persia, hath commanded us."

This complete refusal turned the Samaritans at once into the bitterest enemies. From that hour forward the hatred between them and the Jews went on increasing, till five hundred years later, when our Lord was on earth, we find it intense. The Saviour one day asked a Samaritan woman for a drink of cold water, and she thereupon exclaimed in amazement, "How is it that Thou being a Jew askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans."

She spoke truly. The Jews were indeed forbidden to help any Samaritan, man or woman, however deep distress they might be in ; even wine, securely fastened up as it was in the ancient skin bottles, was counted unfit for Temple use if it had passed through despised Samaria ; and the Samaritans in their turn polluted the Temple with bones and exasperated their enemies in every way they could. All this makes us understand how our Lord's parable of the Good Samaritan must have astonished His hearers, and gave one more cause of offence to the chief priests and Pharisees.

The sharp rebuff of Zerubbabel and the elders of the Jews soon brought trouble. By every means in their power the Samaritans tried to stop the building of the Temple. They "hired counsellors," that is

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they paid men to go to the Persian court and bring evil reports of the doings at Jerusalem, and grandly they succeeded. Cyrus was now far too busy with his many wars to attend to a petty quarrel in Judea; and he was succeeded by two wretched rulers, from whom no one looked for justice, and under whose sovereignty the poor Jews passed through much suffering. For the Persian Empire, of which they formed a part, "was a seething mass of revolts, battles, and murders." A grievous famine also happened then, and they must have felt almost in despair. It is believed that for about fifteen years not one stone was built into the Temple.

However, brighter times were in store for them when Darius Hystaspes became King of Persia in the year 521 before Christ. He secured the throne in so remarkable a way, that I must tell you about it.

The seven great lords of Persia, who had slain the wicked usurpers, decided that the government should be carried on as it was in Cyrus' time, and that one of their number should marry that monarch's daughter, and reign as king; and the rest should help him in the government: but which of the seven was to be the king? That was the puzzling question.

All of them were heathen, worshipping the sun, and they agreed on the following plan. The next morning they were to meet on horseback at a certain place, just as the sun rose; and the rider of the first horse which neighed when he saw the sun rise, was to reign and marry Cyrus' daughter! I do not hear that the poor girl was asked whether she liked this

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arrangement or not ; women in those days were not allowed much liberty of choice. Luckily for her, the horse which Darius Hystaspes was riding was the first to neigh ; and she thus secured a good kind husband, and Persia a firm clever ruler, who was generous and considerate to the Jews.

Darius and Zerubbabel had been boyish friends together, and when Darius obtained the throne, he recalled him from Jerusalem, and gave him the grand position of one of his bodyguard, which had to watch, in turns, over the king night and day, lest he should be assassinated. Three of them always kept guard in his bedroom. Zerubbabel managed to get great favours for his countrymen and the Temple, through being a courtier in so important a post.

One night the king could not sleep well : perhaps it was because he had just finished giving a grand feast to hundreds of his princes and lords. Anyhow, he began talking to the three on duty there ; he wanted to know which was the strongest, wine, the king, women, or truth ? He told them to think the matter over, and in the morning he would like to hear speeches from all three on the subject ; and the one who spoke most convincingly should be clothed in purple (the colour reserved for royalty in olden days), drink in cups of gold, sleep upon gold (!), have a chariot with bridles of gold, sit next to the king, and be called his cousin.

The first man was ordered to declaim on wine as the strongest power in the world. The second had to show that kings were the most powerful ; whilst Zerubbabel, who was the third, had to prove that the

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influence either of women, or of truth, was the very strongest.

The next morning Darius summoned all the great men and princes, and then sat on his throne to hear the speeches. Number one began very truly by saying that wine is so strong that it deceives the mind of those that drink it; it takes away the remembrance of their friends and companions, for it arms men even against those that are dearest to them, and makes them appear as if they were the greatest strangers, with more to the same effect.

Number two showed how great the king's power was, "They command men to level mountains, pull down walls and towers, nay, when they are commanded to be killed, and to kill, they submit to it, that they may not appear to transgress the king's commandment. And whatsoever the king says or commands, it is done of necessity, and that without delay. It must appear that the king exceeds all in strength, while so great a multitude obey his injunctions."

Then came Zerubbabel's turn. "Wine is strong," he said, "so is the king also whom all men obey; but women are superior to them in power, for it was a woman that brought the king into the world."

After this he grew more serious and told that great company of heathen princes and officials about the true God, adding: "Both women and the king himself are weaker than truth; for although the earth be large, and the heaven high, and the course of the sun swift (he was speaking to those who were worshippers of the sun), yet are all these moved

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according to the will of God, Who is true and righteous, for which cause we ought to esteem truth to be the strongest of all things, and that what is unrighteous is of no force against it. Moreover all things else that have any strength are mortal and short-lived, but truth is a thing that is immortal and eternal. Blessed be the God of truth."

This speech of Zerubbabel is famous as it roused his hearers to cry out, "Truth is great and will prevail" (*Magna est veritas et praevalebit*). People little know when they use this familiar proverb, that they are quoting the Apocrypha. It is found in the fourth chapter of the first book of Esdras. The Apocrypha is the original source of other well-known sayings, such as, "He that toucheth pitch shall be defiled therewith."

Zerubbabel had won the day! The king was so delighted that he told him he might ask for something over and above that which had been promised to the victor. Zerubbabel had one desire above all others, and that was the restoration of Jerusalem and the Temple; and it was for these he made his request. The king was pleased with his words, and arose and kissed him, and furthered his wishes in every possible way.

When Zerubbabel left the palace brimming over with joy at receiving these great favours, we are told that he looked up to heaven and gave God thanks for the success he had gained by His help: "For (said he), I had not been thought worthy of these advantages, O Lord, unless Thou hadst been favourable unto me."

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As soon as possible he hurried to Jerusalem to tell its inhabitants this good news. He found everything there in a sad state. The Jews had already grown careless in religious matters ; the poor were ground down, and in a wretched condition ; while the rich, living in their own luxurious houses, built chiefly out of the materials originally prepared for the Temple, would not exert themselves to do their duty to their God. They answered Zerubbabel, "The time has not come yet to build the Temple." We read all about this in the book of the aged prophet Haggai, and also in that of Zechariah the young priest. It must all have been terribly disappointing to Zerubbabel and those holy men who were of his mind.

At last, however, the warnings and encouragements of these two prophets of God roused the nation, and they began to build His House in real earnest. So well did they work that it was finished in four years ; its golden doors set up, and everything ready for the Dedication Service which took place in the year 516 before Christ. The last five Psalms are supposed to have been written for this ceremony ; they are full of faith and praise.

Shortly afterwards the Feast of the Passover was celebrated, and many sacrifices offered, "but the victims which excited most attention were twelve venerable goats, chosen to represent the twelve tribes, as an indication that the whole nation, though only represented in Judah and Benjamin, still claimed the Sanctuary as their own."

From this time the name of Zerubbabel appears

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no more. Tradition says he died in Babylon. Jeshua, Haggai, and Zechariah all pass from our view, and for about sixty years history is silent as to what happened in Judea.

We can gather, however, some idea of the nation from the book of Malachi, the last of the prophets, as it was written during this interval. It is a very sad picture he draws for us of the corrupt state of Jewish society. Marriages with the heathen were frequent, while Jewish wives were divorced on the slightest pretext. The Sabbath day was not kept holy, and they grumbled at the command to maintain the Temple services, and neglected to bring in their tithes and offerings.

God was looking-on all this while and noting everything. "Your words have been stout against Me, saith the Lord. Ye have said, It is vain to serve God." It was a time when evil triumphed.

Yet through that darkness flashes one of the brightest sunbeams that are found in the Bible. We read there were some who grieved that God's name and laws should be so dishonoured, and to them He sent His special blessing. "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another : and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels."

We also know that the Jews were in awful peril during these years of silence, for all the facts contained in the Book of Esther occurred during

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this period. How the Persian King Ahasuerus, better known by his Greek name, Xerxes, was bribed by his wicked prime minister, Haman, to destroy all the Jews in his vast dominions. Haman hated them because, Mordecai, a Jew, would not cringe before him. The bribe he offered was three million pounds! The king, who was a despicable character, was pleased at the thought of these tremendous riches, and allowed Haman to have his royal ring or seal, and send out despatches to every part of his empire (which shows us how numerous and widely scattered were the Jews even then), ordering all who belonged to the chosen people to be massacred on a certain day.

The terrible deed would surely have taken place had not Esther, Xerxes' Jewish Queen, interceded for her nation. There are some chapters in the Apocrypha about her, telling us how she fainted when she came to ask the king this favour.

While the Jews in Palestine were as a whole growing godless, those left in Babylon were quite the reverse, being stirred to great zeal by Ezra, the scribe, who seems to have been the means of founding there a sort of theological college. Tradition says also that Ezra was the originator of synagogues, or houses of prayer: we read a great deal about them in the New Testament. Our Lord constantly went to their services, and it was through the synagogues that Christianity was first spread abroad.

When the Jews were carried captive to Babylon, they had of course no sacrifices, no temple, and their

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only meeting-places seem to have been by the river-side, or banks of the numerous canals. After a while, shelters or synagogues were built, where they could meet and pray together whatever the weather might be, and read their scriptures, and observe their fasts and festivals, and thus keep religion alive among them. It got to be the rule that when a congregation of ten men existed, there a synagogue might be built; so all over the world wherever a group of Jews were found, a synagogue would also be seen.

When our Lord was on earth more than two hundred synagogues were built in Jerusalem alone. It was from synagogues that the Christian parish churches had their rise. In this twentieth century too, wherever any of our nation are living, we, like the Jews of old, will almost invariably have a House of God within reach. Quite recently a French professor remarked to one of our clergy, "Sir, you English are a wonderful people, you cannot go anywhere without your God."

Ezra, the scribe, came from a family distinguished for their piety and zeal. An ancestor of his named Hilkiyah, found the forgotten book of Deuteronomy hidden away in the Temple, and sent it to King Josiah to read, the result of which was a much needed reformation, which is described in the twenty-second and twenty-third chapters of the second book of Kings. Then Ezra was a great-grandson of Seraiah, who was killed by command of King Nebuchadnezzar, and whose sons carried the book of the Law to Babylon in the captivity.

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In that land of exile, far away from the Temple and its services, they learnt to study and love God's Word. Those who taught and explained it were called scribes, and were held in great respect. At first they were always priests, but not so later on : in time they became a powerful body of men. " The scriptures were all given into their keeping, and they wrote the copies out with the utmost care, as they were held guilty if the smallest point or mark failed."

They appealed to the Old Law in the most trivial matters, or else to the Tradition of their fathers. When our Lord Jesus Christ appeared as the Great Teacher, telling of the Father's love, and of the Kingdom of Heaven, we read, " The people were astonished at His doctrine ; for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."

Beginning with an earnest wish to have God's Law better kept, the scribes wrote a book of rules to enable the people to do this, and to make, as they said, " a Hedge to the Law " ; but gradually they got to care more for their own explanation than they did for the Word of God ; till at last we read that they declared " an offence against the saying of the scribes is worse than one against those of Scripture ! "

We know, too, that when Christ came He told them, " Full well ye reject the commandment of God that ye may keep your own traditions." If a man said, " It is Corban," namely, a gift dedicated to a religious use (even though he did not spend it that way), he need not help his father or mother, however

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poor they were, thus teaching the people to break the fifth commandment, which bids us love, honour, and succour our parents; and the Lord added, "Many such like things ye do." One of His most terrible denunciations was against the scribes, so utterly hollow and vain had their religion become; "Ye receive honour one of another," He said, "and seek not the honour that cometh from God only."

All this, however, was five hundred years later when they had degenerated. The scribe Ezra was a true follower of God, only anxious to do His will to the very utmost; he spent most of his time in collecting together and setting forth a correct edition of the Holy Scriptures. Having moulded his own life in accordance with the commands of God, he taught and preached to the Jews in Babylon with such inspiring confidence that they were roused to godly zeal; and having accomplished this, his thoughts turned to Jerusalem, as every good Jew's did, and he longed that his countrymen there might become more God-fearing.

Having obtained leave from the Persian Court, he started to visit them, accompanied by priests and Levites and laymen: rich presents, too, were given him by the king and nobles, as well as by his own people; evidently he was a man of high position in Babylon. The party consisted altogether of about one thousand persons.

They had no guard of soldiers with them for that dangerous journey, for Ezra tells us in the eighth chapter of the book bearing his name: "I was ashamed to require of the king (Artaxerxes, who

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was very kind to the Jews) a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way : because we had spoken unto the king saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him : but His power and His wrath is against all them that forsake Him. So we fasted and besought our God for this, and He was intreated of us."

The end of the perilous, wearisome journey was safely reached, for "the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way : " no doubt the large amount of silver and gold they were known to be bearing from the Persian Court would cause the murderous brigands to do their best to stop the caravan, but he who has God with him need fear no evil.

Before that awful midnight when God Himself passed through the land of Egypt, slaying the first-born of man and beast, He promised Moses, "Against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast : " showing us that the little as well as the great things of this world are all ordered by Him, and we can say in strong faith with the Psalmist, "Thou, Lord, hast never failed them that seek Thee."

Without doubt the arrival of this important company in Jerusalem would excite great interest. In spite of the distance, there was frequent communication between Babylon and Judea, and Ezra's fame as a writer and teacher would be well

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known in the Holy City. All those who were trying to serve God would gladly welcome him, and pour out their grief to him at the sad corruption into which their nation was sinking.

Ezra was horror-stricken at hearing that many of the Jews, including even some of the priests, had contracted marriages with the tribes around. This to Ezra was a fearful sin. In his agony he rent his clothes, tore his hair from his head and beard, and refused food. He then entered the Temple at the time of the evening sacrifice, threw himself on his knees, and prayed, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to Thee, my God ; for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up into the heavens" ; then he went on to confess this special sin. Meanwhile his tearful, heart-broken prayer had attracted a large congregation of men, women, and children, who also wept very sore.

One of the multitude now stepped forward and suggested to Ezra that they should make a covenant with God that they would put away their strange wives. "Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel to swear that they should do according to this word. And they swear." "Having done this he disappeared, and withdrew into the chamber of the high priest's son, in one of the upper storeys of the Temple, and there remained for three days in complete abstinence, even from bread and water," for the sin of his people had entered deeply into his soul.

As soon as possible a solemn council was held,

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and strict inquiries made, and all who had married Gentile wives had to undergo the bitter pain of separation or else be excommunicated from the Jewish Church.

We can well understand how fiercely the relations of the forsaken wives and children resented this treatment, and what terrible enmity they felt against Ezra and his supporters, and how they watched for an opportunity to vex and harm them.

It soon arrived. Ezra is supposed to have begun fortifying Jerusalem and the Temple as soon as its services and this matter about the mixed marriages had been set right. It was a very necessary precaution, as enemies abounded on every side. The Samaritans at once sent word to the Persian Court, but we hear of no notice being taken of this, or of another communication of the same kind which they sent. Later on, however, they succeeded better by means of a clever letter which they wrote, pretending they were anxious for the welfare of the king, and could not bear to see his interests tampered with, and insinuating that the Jews were making preparations to throw off the Persian rule. "Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from thee to us, are come into Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls thereof, and joined the foundations. Be it known now unto the king, that if this city be builded, and the walls set up again, then will they not pay toll, tribute, and custom, and so thou shalt endamage the revenue of the kings."

This letter arrived just as Artaxerxes had been

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smarting from the revolt of Egypt. He did not wish to have Judea also in rebellion, so he sent the Samaritans the following reply, which delighted them beyond measure :

“The letter which ye sent unto me hath been plainly read before me. And I commanded, and search hath been made, and it is found that this city of old time hath made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition hath been made therein. Give ye now command to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded until another commandment shall be given from me.”

At once the Samaritan leaders mounted their horses and dashed off to Jerusalem ; they also took with them a great company of soldiers, and so made the Jews “to cease by force and power.” They burnt the wooden gates of the city, broke down its walls, and destroyed many of its buildings ; most of the inhabitants fled in terror, and the Temple services were stopped. It is believed that Ezra had to escape and hide, for we hear nothing of him for some little time.

All the bright hopes of the Jews seemed again to be utterly crushed, and their horizon darkened for ever. It was not really so, however, for when Nehemiah appeared on the scene, about twelve years after Ezra's departure from Babylon, sunshine woke again in that sad Judean land.

CHAPTER III.

"It grieveth me when I see the transgressors because they keep not Thy Law."

Nehemiah and Artaxerxes—The Walls of Jerusalem Re-built and Dedicated—The Book of the Law the Book of the People—The Feast of Tabernacles—Sealing the Covenant—Nehemiah's Second Visit to Jerusalem—Schismatical Temple Built on Mount Gerizim.

NEHEMIAH was a most winning character; a man of boundless generosity and wealth, of wonderful unselfishness and bravery, but far above all these, a man of prayer. He truly "walked with God," and whatever difficulty, sorrow, or joy visited him, at once it was taken to his Divine Guide, and counsel and strength were obtained to enable him to use the opportunity aright.

He was a high official at the Persian Court, being nothing less than one of the king's cupbearers, a most important post in those old days when treachery and murders were so common everywhere, but especially in royal palaces. One of the favourite ways of putting an end to an unpopular ruler was to give him poison in his food or drink: so the great

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duty of the cupbearer was to pour out, and taste, the goblet of wine, before presenting it to the sovereign.

The Jews as a rule were trustworthy ; and here we find Nehemiah, the Babylonian Jew, cupbearer to the Persian monarch Artaxerxes, the very same king who allowed the Samaritans to destroy the fortifications of Jerusalem and the Temple.

Though far away from the Holy City, Nehemiah took the deepest interest in its welfare. Very sad was he made one day by meeting some of his relations in Babylon who had just returned from Jerusalem, and who gave him an appalling account of the state of things there : how its walls were shattered, and not a few of the inhabitants were carried off as slaves among the neighbouring tribes ; and that in the daytime the roads were found full of dead men ! It was heart-breaking news and completely unmanned Nehemiah. Unprepared as he was for it, he burst into bitter tears. Most likely the travellers were describing the havoc caused by the Samaritans when they made the building cease by main force.

Very miserable was Nehemiah, but he would not show it, for death was the penalty of anyone who dared to come with gloomy looks into the king's presence. But the sorrow was intense, almost unbearable, if Nehemiah had not known on whom to cast his care. He fasted and prayed to the God of heaven : you can read the very words of his prayer in the first chapter of the book of Nehemiah : after which he was calm and ready for whatever turn events might take. The crisis came suddenly.

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Nehemiah was doing his duty, handing wine to his master, when the king broke out with the words, "Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing but sorrow of heart."

Then we read, Nehemiah was "very sore afraid," and he had reason to be. First, he ought not to have been sad before royalty, and then he knew he wanted to ask tremendous favours, and all for Jerusalem and its people, who a very short time ago were denounced by that same king as a city in which rebellion and sedition were harboured!

Should he put his petition so as to offend Artaxerxes, there would be danger for himself and no deliverance for his countrymen, and yet in a moment he must give his answer to the king!

That moment was spent in the best way possible. Nehemiah sent up a prayer to Him Who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. "So I prayed to the God of heaven," and immediately was the prayer granted, and the heart of Artaxerxes inclined to Nehemiah; so that when he asked for leave of absence to go to Judea, with permission to build the walls of Jerusalem, and to get free timber for the work, all was granted without a murmur. Right royally was he sent away, with letters appointing him Governor of Jerusalem, and ordering the governors of the various provinces he passed through to give him every assistance. With him, too, went a troop of Persian soldiers, which would be a great help to Nehemiah against the hostile tribes surrounding Judea.

We are not surprised to read that "when Sanbal-

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lat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant" (two of the bitterest enemies of the Jews), heard of the armed force, and the authority from the Persian Court with which Nehemiah had come, "it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel."

Now was fulfilled the prophecy found in the sixtieth chapter of Isaiah, "And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in My wrath I smote thee, but in My favour have I had mercy on thee."

For three days after arriving in Jerusalem, Nehemiah kept quiet; after such a journey a rest was needed, and he wished to master the situation thoroughly before putting out his plans. On the third night he rode secretly out with only a few trusted companions, to see what state the ruined walls were really in; they must be attended to first of all.

"Each point that Nehemiah reaches is recorded by him as with the thrill inspired by the sight of objects long expected, and afterwards long remembered.

"The Spring of the Dragon (was it that already the legend had sprung up which describes the intermittent flow of the Siloam water, as produced by the opening and shutting of the dragon's mouth?), the gate, outside of which lay the piles of the sweepings and off-scourings of the streets: the masses of fallen masonry: the blackened gaps left where the gates had been destroyed by fire." "Then to the gate of the fountain and the king's pool: but there was no place for the beast that was under

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me to pass, then went I up in the night by the brook (Kedron), and viewed the wall, and turned back."

He had seen all he wanted—a tremendous piece of work lay before him, but it could be done, and must be done.

Having thoroughly made up his mind, he next summoned all the chief men of the place, and told them of the royal command that he had received, and "Of the hand of my God which was good upon me." So infectious was his enthusiasm that he got them to set to work at once on the defences of the city. "Every class of society, every district in the country took part in it. Of each the indefatigable governor recorded the names. He told for after ages how when the priests had finished their portion they at once consecrated it. He recorded for the indignation of posterity how the proud nobles of Tekoah refused to work with the humbler artisans. He arranged how this or that quarter should be restored by those whose houses were close by, so that each inhabitant might look on that portion of the wall as his own. He called for the corporations of the apothecaries, goldsmiths, and merchants to complete what individuals could not undertake."

Clearing away the rubbish alone was a tremendous task; and every stone was laid, in the midst of the greatest peril; for their old enemies, the Samaritans, were filled with spite and anger when they found that Nehemiah's mission was really to fortify and restore Jerusalem once more to its former strength and dignity.

They began by mocking them for their bad

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building. It was done hurriedly, no doubt, as portions of Nehemiah's wall, which have recently been discovered in Jerusalem, show. They said, "What do these feeble Jews? Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall."

Nehemiah was greatly wounded by their sarcasm ; but he kept on at the work. Now the Samaritans joined forces with neighbouring tribes, and attempted to stop the building by warlike means. Sanballat, who seemed the leader, and his friend, Tobiah, and Geshem, the Arabian, who would furnish a troop of those fierce Arab brigands, conspired secretly to attack Jerusalem when the walls had only been half built. Their attempt, however, failed, as the Jews had been warned of the plot, and accordingly the masons worked with swords at their sides, while others kept guard over the weaker portions of the fortifications.

It was a time of incessant danger. Nehemiah took the lion's share of anxiety and toil : he himself tells us that neither he, nor the servants whom he had brought with him, and whom he could utterly trust, took off their clothes day or night during those seven weeks of deadly peril, "Save that we took them off for washing." His trust in God never failed throughout the time ; he bade the Jews to have no fear of their enemies ; "Remember the Lord which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your houses." By Nehemiah's side stood a trumpeter ready to sound the alarm if the enemy

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appeared, which was to be the signal for all to rally round him.

But worse than enemies outside the walls was the grievous treachery and discontent within, arising from those Jews who had been connected by marriage with the Samaritans. The nobles also had been severely rebuked by Nehemiah for having taken advantage of the great poverty of some of their brethren who had borrowed money of them to pay the Persian taxes, or to buy food in years of famine. When the wretched people could not repay the loan, the nobles seized their lands and even sold their children as slaves. Nehemiah set a great assembly against them, and he told them, "We, after our ability, have redeemed our brethren, the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen; and will ye even sell your brethren?" He ordered them to restore houses, lands, vineyards, &c., and they promised to do so, and did it; nevertheless, they felt irritated at having to obey, and were ready to encourage any plot against him.

Nehemiah, however, never asked anything of them that he would not do himself. He set them a magnificent example. Though he was Persian governor, he never demanded a penny of his lawful salary, on account of the poverty of the people; besides which he daily fed one hundred and fifty persons at his table. We know exactly of what this daily meal consisted, namely, one ox, six choice sheep, and fowls, so they had enough to eat! He also advanced money and grain to the poor, and when the time came for repayment, he refused to

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accept it; even his servants liberally helped the distressed Jews.

When Sanballat found that open warfare was useless with such a careful commander as Nehemiah, he tried other means. He suggested that Nehemiah should meet him for a conference on the plain of Ono, about thirty miles distant from Jerusalem, giving as a reason that a report had been spread that Nehemiah wished to make himself a king (which, of course, would mean rebellion against Persia), and they could then consult together how best to stop this wicked slander.

"They thought to do me mischief," exclaimed Nehemiah, who saw through their treachery; "and I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease whilst I leave it, and come down to you?"

Four more times they sent, and four more times he replied with the same words of splendid determination.

Then false prophets were paid by the Samaritans to advise Nehemiah, on pretence of friendliness, to take refuge in the Temple, and so save his life. "Should such a man as I flee? I will not go in," was his reply.

In spite of all these drawbacks the wall of the city was finished in fifty-two days! "And when all our enemies heard thereof, they were much cast down in their own eyes, for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God." We see again in these words how ever present God was to Nehemiah; even the

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mason's and the labourer's tasks, were, to his keen spiritual sight "wrought of our God."

It would be safe to conclude that as soon as ever Nehemiah could make the necessary arrangements, the solemn dedication of the newly built walls would take place; but of the date itself we cannot feel certain. We read "And the priests, and the Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, and the gates, and the wall."

The whole of Jerusalem and the villages round were in a state of festivity on that joyful occasion; singers and players on musical instruments, a company of young trumpeters, all the Jewish nobles and princes, and a large number of the people assembled near the "valley gate," and were there divided by Nehemiah into two great processions.

One of these passed by the walls to the right, and was headed by the aged scribe Ezra, who now reappears, his declining years gladdened without doubt by the magnificent work of Nehemiah, the zealous young layman, who in mind and heart was one with him, but who also possessed the much needed power of organization and governing, which the grave literary Ezra lacked.

The procession that turned to the left had Nehemiah himself leading it, and each division had a choir who sang hymns of praise accompanied by musicians.

Having between them made the circuit of the walls, both processions met in the open courts of the Temple and gave thanks. "And the singers sang loud. Also that day they offered great sacrifices

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and rejoiced ; for God had made them rejoice with great joy ; so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off."

It was, however, not only with the restoration of the walls of the Holy City that Nehemiah's name will ever remain connected. He did a nobler work than that, for with the help of Ezra he made the Law the Book of the people, and not of the priests alone, so that it became the standard of life to all Jews, whether living in Judea or dispersed abroad ; and in doing this he built up the nation on a firm foundation which enabled it to survive the most appalling disasters.

We, too, may be thankful that our Church gives us the Bible for our guide in every event of life : her doctrine and her prayers are founded on it, and no other religious body reads nearly so much from it in public services.

Let us strive earnestly that its life-giving truths may be handed on to our children, and that from earliest infancy they may be educated in the fear and love of God, and a knowledge of those Holy Scriptures which are able to make them "wise unto salvation through faith, which is in Christ Jesus."

It was shortly after the walls were finished that the people were gathered together in a broad, open space before the Watergate, to hear Ezra, who was mounted on a pulpit of wood, read and explain the book of the Law. Levites supported him, and took up the reading when he ceased.

Many of the hearers were listening to God's Word

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for the first time, and it made a deep impression on them. They wept aloud ; perhaps when they heard of the awful judgments that would fall on those who refused to obey the Law of God : but Nehemiah and Ezra and the Levites stilled the people, telling them not to mourn for it was a day of holy gladness, and “ the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

The next day came all the influential men of the nation, priests as well as laymen, and asked Ezra for further instruction in the Law.

There they found written that at the Feast of Tabernacles, the people were to dwell a week in booths made of branches of trees, in remembrance of their ancestors' wanderings in the wilderness.

There only wanted a few days before the date of the Feast, so they at once caused heralds to publish the following proclamation in Jerusalem and the neighbouring cities : “ Go forth into the mount and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees to make booths.”

We know from the seventh chapter of the Gospel of St. John that our Lord Jesus Christ Himself attended the Feast of Tabernacles.

The Jews joyfully obeyed the heralds' summons, and such an excellent Feast of Tabernacles had not been held for ages. On every one of the eight days that the Feast lasted was the Book of the Law read publicly, and from that time forward it always formed a part of Divine service.

The people being full of religious enthusiasm, Ezra and Nehemiah seized the opportunity of

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proclaiming a day of humiliation, and confession of sin, and renewal of the Covenant with their God ; it was to take place the next day but one after the Feast of Tabernacles had ended, and was strictly for the Jews alone.

The people arrived dressed in mourning, that is to say, in black sackcloth, with ashes on their heads : they took a solemn oath that they would keep the commandments found in the Law, especially those of separation from the heathen, keeping holy the Sabbath day, and pledging themselves to a yearly payment of a little over one shilling from every Jew who was twenty years old and upward : the money to go towards the expenses of the Temple services.

The list of obligations binding on the people was written on a scroll, and sealed (for very few could write in those days) by the heads of families. Nehemiah's name stood first, and was followed by about one hundred others.

This was a marked day in the history of the nation, building them up into a congregation or Church, and helping them to keep separate from every other nation in the midst of whom they lived ; "only thus could the religion of revelation be preserved."

It is believed that this assembly (composed first of those that sealed the scroll) continued in some form or other right through the Jewish history, being as it were a parliament of the nation. In the New Testament it is called the Council, and in other writings the Sanhedrin, and it was that body of

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men that condemned the Lord Jesus to death, saying, "By our Law He ought to die because He made Himself the Son of God."

One other task awaited Nehemiah before he went back to his royal master, and that was almost to repeople Jerusalem, for it was far too thinly populated for its size. He was very particular as to who should be allowed the privilege of living in the Holy City: none but those who could prove they were true Jews were admitted. Three families of priests who could not show they were descended from Aaron were refused.

After this, Nehemiah had to return to Babylon, but he left everything, as he thought, thoroughly well established, owing to his hard work and perseverance.

How long he stayed away we do not know, he was not his own master, and had to obey orders, but we may be quite sure that he came back as soon as he could to Jerusalem. When he did arrive, and heard of all that had taken place during his absence he must have been terribly distressed and had he not made God his unfailing Friend and Comforter, despair would have weighed him down.

Jerusalem had soon forsaken the right way. The Jews had fallen back into their old intercourse with the Gentiles around, and mixed marriages again were the result; Eliashib, the high priest, himself setting an example. Not only was his grandson married to the daughter of Sanballat, the Jews' enemy, but he himself was "allied" in some way, to Tobiah, the other fierce enemy of the Jews, and had

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actually handed over for his use one of the best rooms in the Temple precincts.

Nehemiah feared no one but his God, and stern measures of reformation were put in hand immediately.

He began by ordering all the furniture belonging to Tobiah to be cast out of the large room that the high priest had allotted to him ; which was then thoroughly purified and re-dedicated to its original use as a storehouse for the reception of provisions for the priests and Levites. He next commanded the tithes to be again paid ; these had been neglected, and the starving Levites and singers had to forsake their duties in the Temple, and go and farm their land to get support for life.

His orders were obeyed, and the large chamber was once again full of meat offerings, and frankincense, and corn, and wine, and oil.

Nehemiah, too, was shocked at seeing the work that was done on the Sabbath day. "Some were treading wine-presses, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses ; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the Sabbath unto the children of Judah." And this though Nehemiah had taken such pains that none save good Jews should inhabit the Holy City.

To stop this traffic, he commanded the gates of Jerusalem to be shut the whole of the Sabbath day, and guards were set, so that no trading could be

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done. "He also threatened the pedlars who lodged outside the walls."

Then he set about the hardest task of all, and that was to rebuke those who had taken Gentile wives, and to make them give them up.

Of Manasseh, the grandson of the high priest, who had married Sanballat's daughter, and who evidently refused to put her away, Nehemiah writes the significant words, "I chased him from me." Manasseh had indeed done grievous wrong; as a priest he should have been especially careful not to marry a Gentile, and then he dared to choose a wife from among the family of his country's fiercest foe; there was not the shadow of an excuse for him.

The excommunication of Manasseh from the Jewish Church gave the signal for many of the leading families in Jerusalem, priests as well as laymen, to leave too; for they were bitterly opposed to the sweeping reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah, and had no desire to lead the stricter life.

Sanballat, as we can well imagine, was determined to revenge this insult to his family, and he thought of the most exasperating thing he could do to the Jews. He built a rival temple on Mount Gerizim in Samaria, and made his son-in-law Manasseh first high priest of it, and thus founded the schismatic worship of the Samaritans, which sect continues to this very day, though now insignificant, as it numbers scarcely more than a hundred souls. This was in the year 432 before Christ. The Samaritan Temple lasted rather more than three hundred years, and then at length the Jews were able to destroy it, to their great joy.

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You remember, in the fourth chapter of St. John's Gospel, the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well directed our Lord's attention to the beautiful mountain of Gerizim, with its rugged steel-blue rocky slopes, and, crowning the summit, a few remains of Sanballat's once famous temple, and said, "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Twelve huge roughly squared stones can still be seen on the very top of Gerizim, which are believed to have formed a part of the foundation of the ancient schismatical temple.

Of what Nehemiah and the Jews felt when they heard of the building of this rival temple we are told nothing, but we know it must have been a deep sorrow that so many of their "kinsmen according to the flesh" should have separated themselves from the True Church, gone just opposite to God's command of "Not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words."

Very grievous is it to think how this sin of Manasseh's has been repeated over and over again by Christian people, so that nowadays the sects (that is, all who have separated themselves from the Catholic Church founded by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself) are reckoned by hundreds, and the Saviour's seamless vesture thus sorely rent.

"From all false doctrine, heresy, and schism,
Good Lord, deliver us."

CHAPTER IV.

“When Thy word goeth forth it giveth light and understanding.”

Murder in the Temple by the High Priest—Alexander the Great—Simon the Just, High Priest—The Septuagint—Onias II. of Little Soul—Joseph, Tax Collector.

FOR about one hundred years after Nehemiah's second visit to Jerusalem, we know hardly anything of what went on in Judea.

One terrible crime took place, which sets forth very plainly, what we see later repeatedly in the New Testament, that the high priests were often very wicked men, and only desired the sacred post for the worldly advantages it gave. The Jewish high priest was not only head of the Church, but for many years also head of the State, as President of the Sanhedrin or Great Assembly.

The crime was committed by a high priest called Johanan, whose brother Joshua was a great friend of Bagoses, the powerful Persian governor of Syria, the country north of Judea, under whose rule the Jews were placed.

Joshua longed for the post of high priest for

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himself, and meanly went to Bagoses and asked for permission to depose his brother and seize the office. This action alone shows how unworthy he was of being God's high priest. His brother Johanan appears in a still worse light, for when Joshua came to Jerusalem armed with full powers from the Syrian governor to depose his brother, a fierce quarrel took place between them in the inner courts of the Temple itself, ending in the murder of his brother by the high priest !

Bagoses, hearing of this shocking event, hurried up to Jerusalem full of wrath, and insisted on entering the Temple and investigating the spot where the foul deed occurred. The priests tried to stop him, for a Gentile was considered to be impure, and strictly forbidden to set foot in the sacred building. Bagoses was very angry at this, and exclaimed : " What, am I not better than the dead carcase of him ye have slain in this place ? " Whereupon he entered without further opposition. Then he assigned the Jews a heavy punishment, and at the same time filled his own pockets. He ordered them to pay a fine of a guinea and a half for every lamb that was offered on the altar. Now for the regular sacrifices alone, over eleven hundred lambs were needed every year, besides which there were countless private sacrifices, so that Bagoses made a good purse for himself out of his friend's death, as the punishment lasted seven long years.

Soon after this event, Egypt and Syria rose against the Persian rule, and as Judea lay just between these two states, she suffered severely from

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armies marching through her land, ravaging the country, and carrying off many of her inhabitants into slavery.

“The Persian power was rapidly coming to an end through its own wickedness; their kings grew worse and worse, brother killed brother, son rose against father, and the women also committed horrible crimes. They invented tortures too dreadful to mention, and lived between savage cruelty and vain luxury till there was no strength or courage in them.”

In the year 333 before Christ, Alexander the Great, King of Greece, only twenty years of age, but one of the grandest men that ever lived, determined to conquer the Persians, the old enemy of his country. His army was very brave and had been splendidly trained by his father.

“The then reigning Persian king was weak and luxurious. He carried with him on his march, his mother, all his wives and slaves, and all the grandeur of his palace. Before his army went a number of men bearing silver altars, on which burnt the sacred fire. Then came three hundred and sixty-five youths in scarlet dresses to represent the days of the year: then the Magi, and the gilded chariot, and the white horses of the sun: and next the king’s favourite soldiers, called the Immortal Band, whose robes were white, their breastplates set with jewels, and the handles of their spears golden. They had small chance of victory in the field against the active Greeks; and at the battle of Issus they were routed, and the Persian monarch fled away, leaving

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his enormous treasure and all his women to the mercy of the conqueror.

When Alexander entered the royal Persian tent, he found the steaming perfumed bath prepared for the king, and a rich repast spread out, but all the ladies were crying piteously, thinking that their lord had been killed in battle. Alexander comforted them, and showed great politeness to the poor old mother of the defeated king. He never sat down in her presence unless she asked him to do so, and he never grieved her but once, and that was by showing her a robe that his mother and sisters had spun, woven, and embroidered for him, and offering to have her grandchildren taught the like works. She fancied this meant he was treating them as if they were slaves, and he could hardly make her understand that the Greeks thought such works an honour to the highest ladies."

Alexander went on to conquer Tyre, and then it is generally believed that he visited Jerusalem. There is a legend concerning his visit to the city. The high priest and all the inhabitants were in an agony of terror when they heard that this mighty warrior was so near them, for though merciful as a rule, he had been pitiless in his treatment of Tyre, many he slew with the sword there, and crucified two thousand of his prisoners of war!

It was a matter of the deepest anxiety as to how they could best pacify this stern monarch?

In their distress "they flung themselves on God's protection, and made devout addresses to Him with sacrifices, oblations, and prayers."

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In a dream in the night—so the story runs—the high priest was shown how he and his people must meet Alexander, and if they did so according to the directions given they need fear no harm: “upon which, when he rose from his sleep, he greatly rejoiced, and declared to all the warning he had received from God.”

Accordingly, as soon as the news came that the great army of the Greeks was seen approaching Jerusalem, the city was beautifully decorated with garlands, and the inhabitants all dressed in their spotless white holiday attire. Then a procession was formed of the people, the priests joining it clothed in fine linen, while the high priest wore his glorious raiment of purple and scarlet, and on his head was the mitre having the golden plate with the name of God engraven on it: he led the way: they marched all night in two ranks, lighted by torches, and with a band of priestly musicians playing on various instruments, and clashing their cymbals.

A bright winter's morn had dawned when they met the dreaded hero of so many conquests.

“Who are these?” he asked his Samaritan guides as the procession approached.

“They are the rebels who deny your authority,” replied the ancient enemies of the Jews, who were looking forward with pleasure to the thought of plundering Jerusalem, and slaying its inhabitants.

Alexander gave one more earnest look at the advancing high priest, then suddenly came forward, alone, and respectfully saluted him. “The Jews also did altogether and with one voice salute

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Alexander and encompass him about, whereupon the kings of Syria and the rest were surprised at what Alexander had done, and supposed him disordered in his mind."

One of his most privileged friends asked him, "How it came to pass, that when all others adored him, he should adore the high priest of the Jews?"

To whom he replied, "I did not adore him, but that God Who hath honoured him with his high priesthood : for I saw this very person in a dream, in this very habit, who, when I was considering with myself how I might obtain the dominion of Asia, exhorted me to make no delay, but boldly to pass over the sea thither, for that he would conduct my army, and would give me the dominion over the Persians ; whence it is that having seen no one else in that habit, and now seeing this person in it, and remembering the vision, I believe that all things will succeed according to my own mind."

"And when he had said this, and given the high priest his right hand, and the priests ran along by him, and he came into the city, and when he went up into the Temple he offered sacrifices to God, according to the high priest's directions, and granted the Jews many favours."

All this may be only a legend, but it is more than probable that Alexander must have visited Jerusalem some time during his many conquering marches, and he certainly was very considerate to the Jews, a number of whom joined his army, on his promising to respect their religion and customs.

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It is extraordinary to think of the enormous changes which this one man wrought, and yet he only lived to be thirty-three years old. Wherever he went he was victorious, no matter how strong his enemy might be.

The Jews were little troubled by the transfer of power from Persia to Greece, having suffered much from the later Persian sovereigns. Judea was made a province which had Samaria for its headquarters, and here Alexander left one of his generals as governor, but the Samaritans rose in rebellion and burnt him to death.

Alexander was, as might be expected, filled with fury on hearing of it, and he punished them severely. The ringleaders of the rebels were put to an agonizing death. Samaria was filled with soldiers and several of its border-lands given to Judea, who received other favours at the same time.

When Alexander was in Babylon, planning how he could restore the city to its former magnificence and make it his world capital, he began work on the famous temple of the heathen god, Bel. But the Jewish soldiers of his army got into trouble with their officers, as they refused to help with its restoration, declaring they worshipped the True God, and could only build a temple to His honour, as He had said, "Thou shalt have none other Gods but Me."

Hitherto they had promptly obeyed orders, but now they utterly refused to work, and in consequence were severely punished. But nothing would shake their resolution. The affair at last reached Alexander's ears, and heathen though he was, he

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respected their religious scruples, and excused them that part of the building operations.

It was through the unhealthy swamps surrounding Babylon that this wonderful warrior king came to his death. He caught malarial fever, lingered a few days and then died in the very height of his glory.

His body was preserved in honey, put into a glass coffin, and conveyed "in a golden car drawn by sixty-four mules, each with its golden cover and golden bells, across desert and mountain, through the hills and vales of Palestine, till it was deposited in his tomb at Alexandria."

Some time previous to this, Alexander (in return for valuable services the Jews had rendered him) invited his Judean subjects to come and settle in this new city of Alexandria, giving them equal privileges with his own people, and setting apart a quarter of the town for their especial use. Thousands therefore flocked to Egypt, so that there now existed three great Jewish settlements, one in the Holy Land, one in Babylon, and the Alexandrian one: thus the knowledge of the true God was being widely spread, and the world gradually prepared for the fuller revelation of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus.

The colony of Jews in Alexandria became very famous in time for their learning. The book called the "Wisdom of Solomon" was written by one of them; I have already quoted from it the beautiful lesson chosen for All Saints' Day, but the book is full of striking sayings and passages; I will choose just a few of them.

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“Righteousness is Immortal” (Wisdom i. 15).

“Though the righteous be prevented with death, yet shall he be in rest. For honourable age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that is measured by number of years. But wisdom is the grey hair unto men, and an unspotted life is old age. He pleased God and was beloved of Him, so that living among sinners he was translated. He being made perfect in a short time, fulfilled a long time: for his soul pleased the Lord therefore hastened He to take him away” (Wisdom iv. 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14).

“But the righteous live for evermore, their reward also is with the Lord, and the care of them is with the most High. Therefore shall they receive a glorious kingdom, and a beautiful crown from the Lord’s hand: for with His right hand shall He cover them, and with His arm shall He protect them” (Wisdom v. 15, 16).

“Thou lovest all the things that are, and abhorrest nothing which Thou hast made: for never wouldest Thou have made anything, if Thou hadst hated it. And how could anything have endured, if it had not been Thy will? or been preserved, if not called by Thee? But Thou sparest all: for they are Thine, O Lord, Thou lover of souls” (Wisdom xi. 24, 25, 26).

“Love is the keeping of her laws” (Wisdom vi. 18), reminds one of the saying of the Lord Jesus, “He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me”: so do the words “To know Thee is perfect righteousness: yea, to know Thy power is the root of immortality” (Wisdom xv. 3),

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call to mind our Saviour's words, "This is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God."

That best and longest of all the books of the Apocrypha, Ecclesiasticus, or the Church book, was translated from Hebrew into Greek at Alexandria.

"There is no more exalted description of the true greatness of prayer" than is to be found in the second chapter of Ecclesiasticus. "Whatsoever is brought upon thee take cheerfully and be patient when thou are changed to a low estate. For gold is tried in the fire, and acceptable men in the furnace of adversity. Believe in Him, and He will help thee. Look at the generations of old and see: did ever any trust in the Lord and was confounded? or did any abide in His fear, and was forsaken? or, whom did He ever despise that called upon Him? As His majesty is, so is His mercy" (Ecclesiasticus ii. 4, 5, 6, 10, 18).

Here is a tender compassion that reaches far into the future religion of mankind, "Let it not grieve thee to bow down thine ear to the poor, and give him a friendly answer with meekness. Deliver him that suffereth wrong from the hand of the oppressor; and be not faint-hearted when thou sittest in judgment. Be as a father unto the fatherless, and instead of a husband unto their mother; so shalt thou be as the son of the most High, and He shall love thee more than thy mother doth" (Ecclesiasticus iv. 8, 9, 10).

It was in Alexandria that the great work of translating the Old Testament Scriptures into Greek took place; a work that did more than anything else to

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prepare the way for Christ, for it brought the Sacred Writings within reach of the Gentile world.

Hebrew copies of God's Word were very scarce on account of their great expense, only the learned scribes being allowed to make them ; but when once they were translated into Greek, the Gentiles had no such feelings of intense reverence to hinder them from putting anyone who could write to this work. Sometimes a hundred or more slaves would be writing in one hall, with a reader in the centre dictating to them. In this way copies could be bought for quite a small sum, and they were eagerly purchased by the Gentiles who longed to find out the beliefs of the strange people living in their midst who had no God that could be seen and yet who were so deeply religious.

The Greek translation was begun about two centuries and a half before the birth of Christ. It was called the Septuagint because (it is believed) seventy or seventy-two wise Jews were engaged on the work. Tradition has it that these men lived together in a little island in the harbour of Alexandria on which stood one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the celebrated Pharos or lighthouse. Of course in those days our powerful revolving lights were unknown, and this Pharos was a very high white marble tower, on the top of which a fire was kept continually burning, which could be seen, it is said, a hundred miles distant at sea. The tower, and the mole connecting the island with the mainland had only been finished a year or two before the translators arrived there from Jerusalem. These works

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must have filled them with astonishment. They little knew that the light which, through their exertions, was going to be shed on the dark world, would prove a million fold more powerful and more beneficial than was the lighthouse on that dangerous coast.

Some people say the Egyptian king wanted the translation for the grand Alexandrian library, for which his father had collected thousands of valuable manuscripts ; anyhow, the Jewish people themselves had great need of it, for ever since the Captivity, the old Hebrew language and writing had become almost unintelligible to them, and they had to employ an interpreter in their synagogues. Alexander the Great unknowingly did much to prepare the way for Christ's coming, by getting the Greek language spoken everywhere, and wherever he went he left the mark of civilisation and culture on its inhabitants. He planted Greek settlements and founded Greek cities, so that twenty years after his death, the language, the literature, and the arts of Greece were to be found in all the then known world. "Every person with the slightest pretence to education spoke Greek, their own language surviving as a provincial dialect."

After Alexander's death his vast empire was seized by his strongest generals, and for a time all was turbulence and strife ; Judea was seized by Ptolemy (who had also made himself king of Egypt) in the year 320 before Christ. Jerusalem, however, would not acknowledge its new overlord, having sworn fealty to another. He, therefore, assaulted it

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one Sabbath day, and entered without resistance, for the Jews, at that time, thought it wrong to fight even for their lives on the Sabbath day.

Ptolemy at first treated them very harshly, and took thousands of them away as captives to Egypt, and settled them in Lybia and Cyrene; we read in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, about the descendants of these very Jews going up to Jerusalem at the memorable Feast of Pentecost when the Holy Ghost came down as a mighty rushing wind and as tongues of fire. It was a man of Cyrene too, Simon, who had the honour of carrying Christ's Cross for Him on that first Good Friday. Ptolemy afterward found that the Jews were the only ones, amongst all his subjects, on whose oath he could absolutely rely, he therefore appointed many of them to important posts in his army, and was in other ways kind to them.

Only a year or two was Judea under the power of the King of Egypt; it was then wrested from him by another of the generals of Alexander the Great, and for the next few years the Jews must have suffered all the horrors that war brings in its train, for their country was continually a battle field. At length, in the year 301 before Christ, Egypt regained the sovereignty over it and kept it for a century; these years under the rule of the Greek kings of Egypt were on the whole some of the most peaceful of their history. Seleucus, another of Alexander the Great's generals secured, among other states, Upper Syria for himself, and built the town of Antioch that we read so much about in the New Testament. To gain

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the friendship of the Jews he gave them great privileges if they would come and live there.

It is from one of the King of Egypt's soldiers that we get an interesting account of a famous Jewish archer called Mosollam.

He was a mounted trooper and was acting as guide to a large company who were travelling on the shores of the Red Sea. Suddenly, for no reason that he could see, the whole caravan halted.

He asked what had happened? Was anything the matter?

One of the party, a soothsayer, pointed to a certain bird, and told him that if they wanted no misfortune to come to them, they must do exactly as that bird did : when it stopped, if they wished to be lucky, they must stop too, and when it flew on, they must move too.

Mosollam, who believed in God Almighty, without saying a word, pulled his bowstring, and in a moment the bird lay dead.

The heathens all cried out in horror, expecting some dreadful thing to happen, but Mosollam was undisturbed ; indeed, he rebuked them, saying, " Are ye not all mad to make such a bustle about a foolish bird? If this bird could have foretold good or evil to come, it would have kept out of this place, for fear of being slain by the arrow of Mosollam, the Jew ! "

In Judea the high priests were answerable for the taxes due to the king. This put enormous power into their hands, and when the leader of the nation was such an one as Simon the Just all went well.

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He lived about three hundred years before Christ, and was a splendid type of high priest. He taught the people that the Jewish Church subsisted on three things, the Law, the Services in the Temple, and Acts of Love. We read in the fiftieth chapter of Ecclesiasticus a grand description of him, from one who evidently knew him well, and loved him.

“How was he honoured in the midst of the people in his coming out of the sanctuary !

He was as the morning star in the midst of a cloud, and as the moon at the full : as the sun shining upon the temple of the most High, and as the rainbow giving light in the bright clouds : and as the flower of roses in the spring of the year, as lilies by rivers of waters, and as the branches of the frankincense-tree in the time of summer : as fire and incense in the censer, and as a vessel of beaten gold set with all manner of precious stones : and as a fair olive-tree budding forth fruit, and as a cypress-tree which groweth up to the clouds.

When he put on the robe of honour, and was clothed with the perfection of glory, when he went up to the holy altar, he made the garments of holiness honourable.

When he took the portions out of the priest's hands, he himself stood by the hearth of the altar, compassed with his brethren round about, as a young cedar in Libanus ; and as palm-trees compassed they him about.

Then he went down, and lifted up his hands over the whole congregation of the children of Israel, to

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give the blessing of the Lord with his lips, and to rejoice in His Name."

The acts of love, too, were not forgotten by Simon ; he worked hard for the good of his people. He rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, which the King of Egypt had long ago demolished for fear of their affording shelter to his enemies. He repaired the Temple, and excavated a large reservoir underneath it, which was fed by a subterranean canal from some beautiful springs. Thus, even if the Holy City were straitly besieged, there would be no longer any danger of a water famine. He also got a better water supply for the whole of Jerusalem. If only all the high priests had been like him, what a different history the nation would have had.

His holy character made a deep impression on his countrymen ; even to this very day his grave is pointed out in a valley a little north of Jerusalem.

Alas ! we soon hear of a different high priest, "one of little soul, and a great lover of money," Onias II. No wonder this was said of him, for he might have brought untold misery on his country through his covetousness.

He refused to pay the tribute due from Judea to the King of Egypt ; the sum of money demanded was not large, but was a mark of submission to the overlord.

Naturally, the king was very angry about it, and threatened to ravage the Holy Land. Fortunately, the high priest's nephew, Joseph, was shrewd enough to turn away the King of Egypt's displeasure ; he also gained such favour with him, that he received

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the appointment of head tax-collector for the whole of Palestine, with two thousand soldiers to help him in case any towns refused his demands. One or two did so, upon which Joseph slew the principal men of the place, confiscated their property, and sent it to the king, who praised him for his "prudent conduct and gave him leave to do as he pleased. By this means he gathered great wealth together, and made vast gains by the farming of the taxes." He and his family grew very powerful; without doubt he greatly improved the financial condition of Judea by his cleverness and firmness. His was a character that none ought to wish to imitate; he sought for earthly advancement and riches above everything, and used any tool, however base, to get them, and he had his reward; but "what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

CHAPTER V.

“ I walk in the midst of trouble.”

Ptolemy Philopater, King of Egypt—Persecution of Jews at Alexandria—Judea subject to Syria—Heliodorus, the Temple Robber—Jason supplants Onias III. as High Priest—Menelaus supplants Jason—Antiochus Epiphanes begins the Great Persecution.

EGYPT and Syria were almost perpetually at strife. The little state of Judea between these two great powers felt “very like to a ship in a storm, which is tossed by the waves on both sides”: their country too must have been overrun by the conflicting armies. As a rule, Jerusalem lying off the highway between the opposing nations was unmolested, but at the battle of Raphia, fought in the year 217 before Christ, the Syrian king, Antiochus, was thoroughly beaten. The victorious Egyptian king, Ptolemy Philopater, determined to make a progress through the provinces which once belonged to him, but of which his enemy had lately deprived him. “Among other cities which he visited in this perambulation Jerusalem was one that had this favour from him.” A “favour” its inhabitants, I expect, would gladly have dispensed with!

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At first all went well. He wished to make the Jews friendly to him, so he gave splendid offerings to the Temple. When, however, he expressed a desire to examine the building, and enter the Sanctuary, and the Holy of Holies, he was told, respectfully, but firmly, that this was an impossible thing to grant to one who did not believe in the true God, and also that even the priests themselves might not visit the Holy of Holies, the high priest alone being allowed this privilege, and that only on one day in each year, the great Day of Atonement.

It was all of no avail ; he would not listen to their pleadings, and began to push his way into the Sanctuary, the priests and Levites trying in vain to bar his progress.

All of a sudden he was seized with panic and fell half-dead on the pavement, from which he was carried out in a helpless condition by his lords.

We need not be surprised at this, believing as we do that God watches over all that passes on earth, and when He wills it, makes people feel His power.

When God gave the ten commandments from Mount Sinai, all the people that were in the camp trembled. And Moses said unto the people, "God is come to prove you, and that His fear may be before your faces." There were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud, and Mount Sinai was altogether in a smoke, because the Lord

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descended upon it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.

Also when the Syrian army was besieging Samaria in Elisha's lifetime, and the Israelites were on the point of having to surrender, the famine being so terrible in the city, God caused the enemy to depart suddenly without a blow when victory was almost in their hands. "For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians to come upon us. Wherefore they arose, and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life" (2 Kings vii.).

Even in these later days we read of something like this in the life of James Chalmers, that famous missionary to the savage tribes of New Guinea. He and his wife, and one or two other missionaries, were living on an island called Suau, and in a letter home, dated January 24th, 1878, he writes thus of the place: "The people are dreadful cannibals. Their finest decorations are human jawbones, and other bones, and sometimes the wretches appear with pieces of human flesh dangling from their arms; there is no doubt that many of them hoped to secure our bodies for a feast."

This, indeed, was perfectly true, and very easily, it seemed, could they accomplish their desire, for Chalmers never used a gun in self-defence, and he

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and his wife slept in a totally unprotected hut in the very midst of these cannibals.

Years after, a chief, who had become very friendly with the missionary, told him that the massacre of the whole white people had been decided on, so that they might hold a grand banquet. Over and over again the would-be murderers came to the low fence that surrounded the shed, which they had only to step over, rush in, and spear the sleeping inmates; yet over and over again they stopped the other side of that low fence; not one dare step across it, and then back they slunk in the darkness to their own homes, cowed by some mysterious power that held them back from the shedding of blood.

What brought that awe? Surely it was God Himself, being the shield of His servants: there is no other answer but this.

Ptolemy Philopater left Jerusalem as soon as he was sufficiently recovered. He was full of vexation and revenge. And it is certain that from this time he did all he could to spite the Jews, and cruelly treated the large body of them who had settled in Egypt.

Alexander the Great had given these Jews when they first settled in Alexandria and the country round, the same rights as he did his own people. These rights Ptolemy now took away from the Egyptian Jews, and not content with inflicting this degradation on them, he ordered everyone to have an ivy leaf branded on him, by a red-hot iron, in honour of his favourite god, Bacchus, the god of wine.

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At the same time he promised to those who submitted to be thus enrolled, and who gave up their own religion, that he would reinstate them in their former position.

Nobly God's chosen people upheld their faith. Of the many thousands who lived in Alexandria, only three hundred were found to turn apostate. This splendid stedfastness stirred up the king's anger, and he determined to kill all the Jews that were found in his Egyptian dominions. They were collected together from the towns and villages where they had made their homes, and were then shut up in an enormous amphitheatre.

Ptolemy arranged that on a certain day they should be brought out to amuse the assembled multitudes by their agonies through being trampled to death by elephants, who had previously been made drunk with wine and frankincense.

But God heard the prayers that those trembling prisoners of His sent up into His holy heaven, and He delivered His servants that trusted in Him.

The day of martyrdom arrived, and the spectators were all in their places, but the king was so stupid with drink that he could not be roused to come to the amphitheatre, and the spectacle had to be put off. The same thing happened the next day. On the third day, however, he had sufficiently recovered his senses to attend in state, and all who could get a holiday flocked into the amphitheatre.

The thousands of Jews, with their wives and children, were packed together in the centre of the

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arena, until the maddened elephants at a given signal were let loose on the helpless mass.

In a moment shrieks and groans of agony and terror were heard throughout the building: but not from the Jews. "The Lord preserveth all them that love Him, but scattereth abroad all the ungodly," were words they had read in their holy scriptures, and now standing unharmed in the midst of that exposed arena, they found those words true by experience.

The elephants never looked at them even; they turned in their fury to the thickly crowded benches of spectators, and wrought awful slaughter among them, trampling hundreds to death.

The king, awestruck the second time, released the brave confessors of their faith, and restored them to their former privileges.

Thirteen years after this deliverance, the Egyptians lost the control of Palestine, which became subject to Syria. The Jews had learnt to hate the dominion of Egypt, and they hailed with delight the soldiers of Antiochus, the Syrian king. Soon they found this yoke even more galling.

In the year 175 before Christ, trouble arose at Jerusalem through the illdoing of a man called Simon: he is supposed to be a son of Joseph, the rich tax-collector, who, after his father's death, had some important office given him in the city. In the third chapter of the second book of the Maccabees, he is called, "Governor of the Temple." Onias III., a noble and upright man, was high priest at that time. There seems to have been rioting in

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Jerusalem, accompanied by bloodshed caused by the followers of Simon, and it was said at his instigation ; the high priest would not overlook the offence, and expelled Simon.

This man was a traitor to his country. In order to vex Onias, he told the Syrian Governor of Judea that there was a huge sum of money stored in the Temple, and that he could easily seize it and present it to his king.

The Syrian treasury just then was very empty owing to incessant wars, and the king was delighted to hear of this speedy way of filling it. He at once sent Heliodorus with a sufficient escort of soldiers to confiscate the money and bring it to him at Antioch.

On arriving at Jerusalem, Heliodorus informed Onias III. of his errand. "Then whoso had looked the high priest in the face, it would have wounded his heart ; for his countenance and the changing of his colour declared the inward agony of his mind." He never attempted to deny that these riches were stored in the Temple, laid up for the relief of widows and fatherless children, and that some belonged to a man named Hyrcanus, who had trusted it to the care of the priests. "And that it was altogether impossible that such wrongs should be done unto them, that had committed it to the holiness of the place, and to the majesty and inviolable sanctity of the Temple, honoured all over the world."

The whole city was in terror, for it was to them almost what it would be to us if the Bank of England were seized and emptied.

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Heliodorus was obdurate, and said positively that the money must be brought into the king's treasury, and forthwith began with his armed men to force his way into the Sanctuary.

All seemed lost, when suddenly a wonderful apparition appeared, which at once checked Heliodorus in his sacrilegious robbery, and he returned empty-handed to Antioch, "where he testified to all men the works of the great God which he had seen with his own eyes." You can read the full account for yourselves in this second book of the Maccabees.

Then the king asked Heliodorus whom he should send to get the treasure, as he dared not go again, and this was the reply :

"If thou hast any enemy or traitor, send him, and thou wilt receive him well scourged, for in that place, no doubt, there is an especial power of God. For He that dwelleth in Heaven hath His eye on that place, and defendeth it ; and He beateth and destroyeth them that come to hurt it."

I have already told you that Alexander the Great introduced Greek learning, language and manners wherever he went, and many among the Jews, whose religion was not deep-rooted, adopted the Greek mode of living, which they found easier to follow than the sterner law of their forefathers, and they thought it more fashionable, and despised those who kept up the good old ways, calling them antiquated.

Alas ! very many of the priests were among the number of the Hellenists, that is those Jews who patronised Greek ideas, and thus they caused their holy office to be despised. From this time the

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Scribes (or teachers of the Law) began to be more honoured and looked up to than God's Priests.

- Jason, the brother of Onias III., was one of these irreligious men. He coveted the high priesthood only for the power and riches it brought with it, and he bribed the new king of Syria, Antiochus Epiphanes, with a great sum of money to give him the post; and he succeeded, Onias meanwhile being detained in honourable captivity at Antioch, whither he had gone to speak to the king about the bloodshed that Simon was causing at Jerusalem.

The faithful Church people must then have looked on in horror at the irreverence and profanation committed by this usurping high priest, who gave up even faith itself to obtain worldly advancement.

The first thing Jason did was to build a school for the training up of young Jewish aristocrats in the ways of the Hellenists. A theatre was erected in the Holy City, and a gymnasium and club placed under the very shadow of the Temple, and in these resorts the young priests were encouraged to spend all their time. Jason cared nothing if the holy services were neglected and finally given up! Indeed, he went so far in his shameless wickedness as to persuade people to relinquish the Jewish religion, and conform to heathen rites; he sent also a sacrifice to Tyre for the false god Hercules, and that at the time when he was holding the solemn office of high priest in God's Temple!

Not long was he allowed to live this life of sin. He had only been three years head of the Jewish nation when a man named Menelaus, whom he had

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employed to take the Judean taxes to the King of Syria, treated him in the same manner as he had treated his good brother, Onias III. For when Menelaus got into the king's presence and had paid the tribute, he promised to bring him a much larger sum next time, if only he would allow him to be high priest instead of Jason. The king, who was a monster of iniquity, as you will soon find out, agreed to this at once, and Jason had to fly from Jerusalem.

Menelaus had promised Antiochus Epiphanes an immense sum of money, and the only way he could make good this promise was by robbery; and he secretly stole the golden vessels from the Temple and sold them! It was found out, of course, and fairly soon, that these precious things were missing, and also who had done the sacrilegious deed, and the righteous Onias, still a prisoner at Antioch, openly denounced Menelaus' conduct to the Syrian king, for such an act was considered a crime even among the heathen.

But what cared Antiochus Epiphanes for reverence and honesty in comparison with gold? Not only did he leave the robber Menelaus in his sacred office of high priest, but three of the Sanhedrin who had come from Jerusalem to complain of this shameful spoliation he caused to be put to death! Justice was unknown in his reign. So little was he respected that popular wit changed his name, Antiochus Epiphanes (that is, Antiochus the Illustrious), into Antiochus Epimanes (that is, Antiochus the Madman). And such indeed he seemed, for he even dressed himself up as a buffoon, with a wreath of

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roses on his head, and then rushed about the streets of Antioch, his capital, pelting with stones everyone that he met.

The sale of the holy vessels brought enough money, not only to pay the king all that Menelaus had promised him, but also to hire assassins to murder Onias III., whom Menelaus hated fiercely on account of the severe rebuke Onias had publicly given him. The murder took place close to Antioch.

When the good man lay mute and still in his last sleep, even heathen as well as Jew honoured and mourned him, "for he had stood a stedfast rock, and a fortress of law and faith in the midst of the surging and foaming flood." God had in mercy taken him away from the evil to come.

How grieved those Jews must have been who were trying to lead holy lives in those dark times we can well imagine, when they heard of their brave leader and true high priest being slain. It was one of these who was writing that beautiful book Ecclesiasticus during those years of sin and sorrow, showing his nation what punishments they were bringing on themselves with their wrong-doing, and cheering God's children by reminding them of His tender constant Presence with them.

Every sort of horror and misery meanwhile was taking place in Jerusalem, whose inhabitants were so enraged at wicked Menelaus' acts that they, and the country people round, rose and killed his brother, whom he had left Governor of Jerusalem with three thousand soldiers.

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Another tumult was caused by Jason, who hearing a rumour that Antiochus Epiphanes had died while away on a warlike expedition, thought it a good opportunity for turning Menelaus out of the high priesthood and getting back that important post for himself again; so he went up to Jerusalem with troops, and so far won the day that he was in command of the city, while Menelaus was shut up in the castle. Then Jason, in his turn, practised dreadful tortures on any who he supposed had taken the part of his rival, putting hundreds of them to death.

Antiochus Epiphanes was not really dead, and news was brought him of all the terrible scenes that were going on in Jerusalem between the parties of the two usurping high priests, and he believed, or pretended to believe, that it was a revolt of the whole Jewish nation; it gave him a better excuse for the cruelty in which he delighted to indulge.

Returning from a successful campaign in Egypt he took his army straight to Jerusalem, being "in a furious mind, and took the city by force of arms. And commanded his men of war not to spare such as they met, and to slay such as went up upon the houses. Thus there was killing of young and old, making away of men, women, and children, slaying of virgins and infants. And there were destroyed within the space of three whole days fourscore thousand, whereof forty thousand were slain in the conflict, and no fewer sold than slain."

The brutal irreligious Menelaus was reinstated high priest, while the no worthier Jason had to make his escape precipitately. He wandered about from

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one spot to another, "pursued by all men and hated everywhere," ever seeking, and never finding a safe retreat. He died in lonely exile, with not a single friend to bury him, or mourn his loss.

Far more keenly than the death of the forty thousand, or the carrying into slavery of so many of their kinsmen, did the righteous Jews feel the profanation of their holy Temple, which Antiochus Epiphanes next set about; no detail that could add exquisite anguish to their lacerated feelings did he omit.

Guided by that arch traitor Menelaus, he entered into the sanctuary: it is not known whether he penetrated into the Holy of Holies. Of course he stole all the precious things that still remained in the Temple, and carried them away with him, the seven-branched candlestick, the table of shewbread, and the altar of incense, which were all of gold; he cut off all the ornaments of gold that were on the building, stripping the place bare; and all the hidden treasure that Heliodorus dared not take: nothing was spared.

The faithful Jews, as they saw the pollution of their House of God, and its emptiness, must then have felt that their cup of sorrow could hold no more. But they were mistaken.

Two years later Antiochus Epiphanes was returning in a great rage from his fourth expedition into Egypt. He had hoped to conquer that land completely, but the mighty nation of Rome was making its power even then felt in all the kingdoms of the world, and the Romans took the part of Egypt

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against Syria. Antiochus was marching upon Alexandria, meaning to make it submit to him : when only four miles distant from the city he met the Roman Embassy, who delivered to him the tablets on which was written the senate's demand that he should at once retire from Egypt, or cease to be their friend.

The King of Syria read the decree, and replied that he would take time to consider.

Immediately, however, the Roman Ambassador drew a circle with his stick round Antiochus as he stood on the sandy ground, and haughtily told him he should not move out of that circle till he had given his answer.

For once the insolent monarch had found his master ; he dared not oppose Rome, fearing lest his own kingdom should be forcibly wrenched from him, as that of Macedonia had been from its king ; so he gave an unwilling assent. He had therefore to leave Egypt at once, and being enraged on this account, he indulged his violence by sending Apollonius, one of his generals, with twenty thousand soldiers, to ruin Jerusalem. No provocation had been offered by its miserable inhabitants.

Apollonius, a fit servant of such a master, entered the city quite peacefully about the time of Pentecost, and concealed all traces of his awful commission till the Sabbath day, when the synagogues being full of worshippers, the soldiers were let loose on these defenceless people, with orders to kill every man, and to secure the women and children to be sold as slaves.

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The streets poured with blood, not a man being spared whom they met. Their next work was to rob and pillage ; and after appropriating the treasures, they set the city on fire, and pulled down its walls. Finally, they reared a fortress on a hill overlooking the Temple, storing it with provisions and armour, and using it for barracks. Then leaving sufficient soldiers to garrison it strongly, with Philip, a stern cruel man, as Governor of Jerusalem, and commanding them to slay any servant of God who dared to come to the Sanctuary for worship, Apollonius departed with the rest of his men to Antioch.

On October 27th of the year 168 before Christ Antiochus Epiphanes issued a proclamation obliging all the nations in his dominions to leave their own religion and to conform to the king's religion, and worship his gods in the same manner as he did. Death was to be the punishment of those who did not obey. By this means he hoped to wipe the Jewish religion and nation off the face of the earth.

In very deed he conferred the greatest blessings on them, for now the chaff was separated from the wheat, and noble souls roused themselves, and went forth in the strength of the Lord God to do battle for the right, and the Jewish people were thus saved from the corrupting influence of the Hellenists, who since the time of Alexander the Great had been secretly poisoning the nation's purity and faith.

Now began a scathing persecution, of which we read a full account in the first and second books of the Maccabees.

Circumcision, the keeping of the Sabbath, and of

fast and festival, and the reading of the Law were absolutely forbidden. Overseers were sent about everywhere to see that these commands were strictly observed.

At Jerusalem a great sow was sacrificed on the Holy Altar of Burnt-offering, so as to insult the Jewish religion to the utmost. Part of its flesh was boiled, and the broth sprinkled over everything, even over the sacred book of the Law. This profanation took place on December 25th, in the year 168 before Christ.

Then a heathen altar was erected in the Temple Court, and the Jews were compelled on pain of death to take part in pagan worship, and to eat swine's flesh on a fixed day in each month.

A considerable number outwardly submitted to these demands. To men of the stamp of Jason and Menelaus, who cared nothing for God and His holy religion, it cost no effort to sacrifice to Hercules or any other heathen idol. The Samaritans obeyed at once, and called their schismatic temple on Mount Gerizim by the name of one of the heathen gods ; but hundreds of faithful Jews chose rather to die than deny the God Whom they trusted and served. You shall hear in the next chapter of the noble way in which some of these glorified God by their deaths.

CHAPTER VI.

“These are they which came out of great tribulation.”

Martyrs under Antiochus Epiphanes—Mattathias begins the Religious War—Judas Maccabeus—Apollonius defeated and slain—Seron and his host defeated at Beth-horon.

AFTER the publication of that terrible edict of October 27th, 168 before Christ, as many of the faithful as could manage it fled out of Judea.

Some went as far as Egypt, others took refuge in the desert regions ; but many were too poor to leave their homes, and others stayed for duty's sake, and these felt the full brunt of the storm ; for Antiochus Epiphanes “had no compassion upon young men or maiden, old man, or him who stooped for age.” Indeed the first victims of his fury were infants a few days old, whose mothers chose “to obey God rather than men,” in spite of the deadly danger they thereby incurred, and had their little sons circumcised at eight days old. This was discovered by the king's spies, and the two noble women were “openly led round the city, the babes hanging at their breasts,” and then were cast headlong down from the castle fortifications.

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Splendid, too, is the account of the brave death of Eleazar the scribe, a man of ninety years, with "a well-favoured countenance. He was constrained to open his mouth and to eat swine's flesh. But he, choosing rather to die gloriously than to live stained with such an abomination, spit it forth."

Among those who had yielded to the king's demands and denied their faith were old acquaintances of Eleazar's, who, contemptible as they were, yet grieved to see the good old man tortured. They therefore suggested to him that he should secretly "bring flesh of his own provision, such as was lawful for him to use, and make as if he did eat of the flesh taken from the sacrifice commanded by the king : that in so doing he might be delivered from death, and for the old friendship with them find favour."

To many this would have seemed a way out of the difficulty ; but Eleazar, in spite of the weakness of old age, was strong in the might of the Lord, and answered straightway :

"It becometh not our age in anywise to dissemble, whereby many young persons might think that Eleazar, being now fourscore years old and ten, were now gone to a strange religion : and so they, through my hypocrisy, and desire to live a little time and a moment longer, should be deceived by me, and I get a stain on my old age and make it abominable. For though for the present time I should be delivered from the punishment of men, yet should I not escape the hand of the Almighty, neither alive nor dead. Wherefore now, manfully changing this life, I will show myself such an one

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as my age requireth, and leave a notable example for such as be young to die willingly and courageously for the honourable and holy laws."

"And when he had said these words, immediately he went to the torment." He was brutally scourged to death, yet though groaning with bodily anguish, his last prayer showed that he was well content to bear all for the sake of that God Whose servant he was.

Antiochus Epiphanes, vexed at hearing how slow the Jews were in adopting the heathen religion, had some victims brought to him at Antioch that he, in person, might enforce his commands and severely punish the offenders.

These were a mother with her seven sons, who were arrested and were compelled by the king, against the Law of Moses, to eat swine's flesh, "And were tormented with scourges and whips."

"But one of them that spake first, said, What wouldest thou ask or learn of us? We are ready to die, rather than to transgress the laws of our fathers." Truly Eleazar's example was bearing glorious fruit.

This noble defiance of the young man before the king himself was more than the pride of the tyrant could tolerate. He at once ordered the most frightful torments to be executed on the youth, his mother and brothers having to be witnesses of them, in the hope of shaking their constancy; instead of which they cheered him through that painful valley of death by reminding him that "The Lord looketh upon us, and in truth hath comfort in us."

When he was dead, they tortured, in the same

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shocking manner, the second. His strong faith enabled him to endure the agony, and his last words were full of hope of the resurrection of the dead : "The King of the world shall raise us up, who have died for His laws, unto everlasting life."

The third brother was similarly tortured, by having his tongue and limbs cut off, and then being slowly roasted to death ; "and when he was required, he put out his tongue, and that right soon, holding forth his hands manfully, and said courageously, 'These I had from heaven, and for His laws I despise them ; and from Him I hope to receive them again.'"

The fourth, fifth, and sixth sons, each in turn suffered the same agonies ; and all died testifying to their faith in God : and there remained only the youngest alive. The king did his very utmost to get him to become an apostate : he promised him with oaths "that he would make him both a rich and a happy man, and he would take him for his friend, and trust him with affairs, if only he would turn from the laws of his fathers. But when the young man would in no case hearken unto him, the king called his mother, and exhorted her that she would counsel her son to save his life."

She promised Antiochus that she would do so, but it was for saving unto life eternal that she counselled the young martyr.

Speaking in her own country dialect, which the Syrians could not understand, she said pleadingly, "Have pity on me, my son : fear not this tormentor, but being worthy of thy brethren, take thy death,

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that I may receive thee again in mercy with thy brethren."

He then made a fuller confession even than the rest, saying to the executioners, "Whom wait ye for? I will not obey the king's commandment: but I will obey the commandment of the law that was given unto our fathers by Moses. I, as my brethren, offer up my body and life for the laws of our fathers, beseeching God that He would speedily be merciful unto our nation."

How the mother's heart must have raised itself in praise to God for the noble sacrifice of the young life so willingly laid down for His sake, even though the pain of witnessing it must have exceeded the sufferer's.

"Then the king, being in a rage, handled him worse than all the rest (if this were possible). So this man died undefiled, and put his whole trust in the Lord."

Last of all came the turn of that heroic mother, who before the sunset, and by the same troublous path, had joined the dear ones she had helped so bravely, and with them was at peace in the Paradise of God; "and there shall no torment touch them."

"These were the first of the noble army of martyrs to whom history has given a voice."

Times of peril indeed those were to live in. Josephus, the historian, thus describes the afflictions of such as dared to remain true to their God. "They every day underwent great miseries and bitter torments, for they were whipped with rods, and their bodies were torn to pieces, and were

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crucified, while they were still alive and breathing. And if there were any sacred Book of the Law found, it was destroyed, and those with whom they were found, miserably perished also." But this destruction of their sacred literature only made the Jews feel more strongly than ever how precious they were, and many copies were saved and eagerly read in secret places.

Not only in Jerusalem, but all over the land, the king's agents were sent to compel the Jews to blaspheme.

At Modin, a little town about eighteen miles from Jerusalem, the principal citizen was a priest called Mattathias, an old man, who had five grown-up sons. We hear nothing of the wife and mother; perhaps God in His mercy had called her to Himself before the storm of agony burst on her country and family, for not one of those five sons, of whom she must have been so proud, died a natural death! We feel sure she had been a loving, prayerful woman, a true wife to her noble husband, and a wise mother to her gifted sons; for, putting aside their bravery, the wonderful obedience to their father even in their ripe manhood, and the absence of the slightest jealousy or quarrelling amongst themselves, bear witness to the most careful and watchful training: a beautiful picture of a family brought up in the fear of the Lord.

The decisive day came to that Asmonean or Maccabean family (for they are called by both these names), the day that comes to every individual soul,

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the crisis of life, when the grand step has to be taken—for God—or for His enemies. The king's officer had arrived in Modin, to compel its inhabitants to sacrifice to idols, and many of the people were gathered together, willing, it would seem, to purchase life by denying their God.

Mattathias and his sons came too, but for a very different purpose: they knew that their turn was at hand, and they had prepared themselves for this eventful hour.

With persuasive words Mattathias was first addressed, he being the leading man of the place, "Thou art a ruler, and an honourable and great man in this city, and strengthened with sons and brethren: now, therefore, come thou first and fulfil the king's commandment like as all the heathen have done, yea, and the men of Judea also, and such as remain at Jerusalem: so shalt thou and thy house be in the number of the king's friends, and children shall be honoured with silver and gold, and many rewards."

The God-fearing old priest was not to be trapped in this way: he cared nothing for earth's honours or riches, his treasure was laid up in heaven, and his grand words of faith rang out so that all might hear:

"Though all the nations that are under the king's dominions obey him, and fall away every one from the religion of their fathers, and give consent to his commandments: yet will I, and my sons, and my brethren walk in the covenant of our fathers. God forbid that we should forsake the Law and the

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ordinances. We will not hearken to the king's words, to go from our religion, either on the right hand, or on the left."

We can well believe how these brave words would rouse the anger of the Syrian officers: perhaps seeing this, and fearing the whole place might be visited with punishment in case the king's agent took Mattathias as their representative, an apostate Jew stepped forward, and proclaimed himself willing to sacrifice on the idol altar, according to the king's commandment.

When Mattathias saw this traitor to his God, "He was inflamed with zeal—wherefore he ran and slew him upon the altar. Also the king's commissioner, who compelled men to sacrifice, he killed at that time, and the altar he pulled down."

Then through the city from end to end he caused the war cry to be proclaimed, "Whosoever is zealous of the Law, and maintaineth the covenant, let him follow me."

Very many responded, and forsaking all their worldly possessions, fled with their wives and children and cattle to the wilderness and mountains, taking refuge in the many caves that abounded there. Some of these caves are enormous, extending for miles and miles in the limestone hills. A recent traveller has told us of one he visited in Judea, which, he said, was large enough to hold the whole population of the country-side, and their cattle as well! These caves were their homes for more than a year; their food consisted chiefly of roots and herbs; "They wandered about in sheepskins and

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goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented (of whom the world was not worthy) ; they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth."

The moment the news of Mattathias' daring act reached Jerusalem, the king's officers took all the forces they had at their disposal and pursued the faithful Jews. They discovered a cave in which a thousand of them were hid.

Terms of peace were at first offered on condition of their giving up their religion. "Let that which ye have done hitherto suffice ; come forth and do according to the commandment of the king and ye shall live," was the message sent them.

They answered resolutely to a man, that they would rather die than forsake the law of their God, so splendidly had the brave confession of the Asmonean family inspired them to cling to their faith.

The General (Philip the Phrygian), who was famed for his cruelty and barbarity, did no more that day than set his soldiers to guard the mouth of the cave. Greatly amazed must the Jews have been at this forbearance, knowing well the temper of the man. But when the Sabbath dawned all was explained. Philip had waited till then, knowing that the Jews refused to fight on that day, so that he could butcher them to his heart's content without opposition. Thoroughly indeed was the work done, neither man, woman, or child escaped, for they said, "Let us all die in our innocence." The soldiers lighted fires at the mouth of the cave, and then threw firebrands in,

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by which many were burnt to death, and many more smothered. That cave became the sepulchre of the thousand refugees !

The few that managed to escape fled to Mattathias and his band, who were terribly grieved at the fate of their countrymen. Mattathias saw that the nation would be exterminated if they continued in this policy of not defending themselves on the Sabbath, even when their lives were in danger : so he and his followers talked the matter over, and agreed finally that to fight on the Sabbath for the sake of preserving life was not wrong, but lawful ; and surely they had made a right decision.

About this time the hands of Mattathias were much strengthened by the arrival of a guild of earnest men, "keepers of the Law and the Traditions," who pledged themselves to lead a religious life, and one of their rules was to fight for the cause of the Temple and its worship : they were "mighty men of Israel." They were then called Assidians, but in later days they were known as Pharisees. All who fled from the persecution also came to the standard of the Asmoneans, so that their numbers grew formidable, and they were able to do a great deal for the cause of the Lord, and the fear of them was on all the countryside. They went about the villages destroying the heathen altars, slaying all those who had given up the true faith, circumcising the children, and rescuing copies of the Book of the Law which had been pillaged from the synagogues.

So sudden and vehement were their attacks, that

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the apostates were in terror of their lives, and fled to the surrounding heathen for protection.

The villagers and labouring people of Judea remained as a whole true to their faith, hardly touched by the wave of infidelity that had swept the land since the days of Alexander the Great.

This life of continual warfare, anxiety, and privation proved too great a strain for the aged priest, and within a year from that memorable confession at Modin, the God Whom he served so stedfastly had called him to his rest. His dying words were a stirring exhortation to his sons to continue the holy war :

“Now, therefore, my sons, be zealous for the Law, and give your lives for the covenant of your fathers. Consider ye throughout all ages, that none that put their trust in Him shall be overcome. Fear not the words of a sinful man. To-day he shall be lifted up, and to-morrow he shall not be found, because he is returned into his dust. Wherefore, ye my sons, be valiant, and shew yourselves men in the behalf of the Law; for by it shall ye obtain glory, and avenge ye the wrong of your people.”

He named his third son Judas Maccabeus (or the Hammerer), as captain to “fight the battle of your people; he hath been mighty and strong even from his youth up;” and his second son Simon he named as a “man of counsel; give ear unto him alway: he shall be a father unto you.

“So he blessed them, and was gathered to his fathers” in the year 167 before Christ. “And his

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sons buried him in the sepulchres of his fathers at Modin, and all Israel made great lamentation for him."

Not one word do we hear of murmuring or disunion from the eldest son, or his other brothers, when Judas Maccabeus reared up the standard in his father's stead. We read "all his brethren helped him, and so did all they that held with his father, and they fought with cheerfulness the battle of Israel." Thus he found himself at the head of a small but resolute and united band of enthusiasts, who were determined not only to resist the tyranny of Antiochus Epiphanes, but to free their brethren from the Hellenists, that is the apostate Jews.

"A cheerfulness was diffused through the whole army when Judas appeared. His countrymen delighted to remember his appearance, as of an ancient giant, when he fastened on his breastplate, or tightened his military sash around him, or waved his protecting sword over the camp of his followers. They listened with delight to the loud cheer, the roar as of a young lion—the race not yet extinct in the Jordan valley—with which he scented out the Israelite renegades. They exulted over his victory over the three, 'the many' kings. But the lasting honour which they pathetically regarded as the climax of all, was that, with a true chivalry, 'he received such as were ready to perish.'"

Judas Maccabeus was indeed "a warrior of God," and his genius, inspired by his strong faith, enabled him to win victories that were little short of miracles.

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At first, like his father, he only attacked at night, but gradually getting stronger and more daring, he went through the land openly, enforcing the Law, putting cities in defence, building fortresses, and garrisoning them with his men.

Of course the Syrian government did not allow all this to go on without opposition. The governor of Samaria, who was the cruel Apollonius, the man that less than two years ago had caused such bloodshed and agony in his sacking of Jerusalem, in his present position as overlord of Judea was responsible for the suppression of this "revolt" of the Maccabeans.

He collected all his local forces, "a great host," and marched towards Judea. "Which thing when Judas perceived, he went forth to meet him, and slew him; many also fell down slain, but the rest fled. Wherefore Judas took their spoils, and Apollonius' sword also, and therewith he fought all his life long."

This battle took place somewhere near Samaria; how this first victory must have cheered the hearts of those hunted, persecuted patriots, and filled them with songs of praise to their God Who had done great things for them.

The news of the disaster soon spread northward to the Syrian court, and another expedition was sent against Judas and his army, but this time it consisted of regular troops, instead of militia; the Syrians beginning to find out that it was no mean enemy with whom they had to fight. Its commander was Seron, who had "a mighty host of the ungodly to help him, and to be avenged of the children of Israel." He marched down the plain of Sharon, passed within

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two miles of the now famous little city of Modin, then up a very steep incline to the Pass of Beth-horon.

It was on the top of this pass that Judas with unerring wisdom posted his handful of heroes. Almost exactly on the same spot, about thirteen hundred years before, Joshua, the famous leader of the Israelites, had vanquished the five kings of South Canaan, and so secured the country for the Jews: he had gained the victory because "the Lord fought for Israel," and Judas Maccabeus relied wholly on that same mighty God, and was calm and confident.

The hosts of Syria could plainly be seen beginning to mount the hill, mighty in armour and numbers, and the little company with Judas turned to him in anxiety: "How shall we be able, being so few, to fight so great a multitude, and so strong, seeing we are ready to faint with fasting all this day?"

They must have felt greatly cheered when they heard the voice of Maccabeus reminding them of the restful truth that, "With the God of Heaven it is all one, to deliver with a great multitude, or a small company. For the victory of battle standeth not in the multitude of an host: but strength cometh from Heaven. They come against us in much pride and iniquity to destroy us, and our wives, and children, and to spoil us; but we fight for our lives and our laws, therefore the Lord Himself will overthrow them before our face: and as for you be ye not afraid of them."

Splendid words of trust in God, when we remember that, as he was speaking, every moment nearer and nearer came the soldiers of the enemy, a mighty

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army ; and they only a few hungry men against them.

But the stirring words of their beloved leader did their work. With a spirited dash they leapt suddenly upon Seron and his host, and with every advantage of ground, and acquainted with every inch of the way, they utterly discomfited the Syrians, slaying eight hundred of them, and pursuing them even farther into the land of the Philistines than did Joshua in his great battle of Gideon. "The Lord fought for Israel" once more.

CHAPTER VII.

“They said in their hearts, Let us make havoc of them altogether.”

Antiochus Epiphanes determines to exterminate the Jews—Judas Maccabeus defeats Georgias and gains the Victory of Emmaus—Judas Maccabeus defeats Lysias and gains the Victory of Bethsura—Death of Antiochus Epiphanes.

THE rage of Antiochus Epiphanes was unbounded when he heard of this fresh defeat of his forces at Beth-horon. Now his cruelty and wickedness could only rest satisfied by the massacre of every human being that belonged to the Jewish race in his dominions. His first idea had been only to make them give up their antiquated religion and conform to heathenism ; failing in this plan, he would now extirpate the whole nation.

He was not able to come himself to execute his vengeance, he had more pressing work elsewhere ; but he sent two of his most experienced generals, Nicanor and Georgias, with orders to reconquer Judea and utterly exterminate the rebels, and to repeople their cities and villages with colonists,

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An overwhelming army was at their disposal, forty thousand foot soldiers, and seven thousand horsemen. Besides these, in their camp at Emmaus were at least a thousand slave dealers. These men had arrived with their assistants owing to a proclamation that Nicanor had published in all the countries round, announcing a grand sale of captive Jews at astonishingly cheap rates; Nicanor having calculated that after the battle he should have about one hundred and eighty thousand of them for sale! He intended to kill outright all the full-grown men of the nation, and to send the rest of the inhabitants into captivity. Hence the presence of so large a number of slave merchants, who had come provided with quantities of gold and silver, and also with thongs and shackles, wherewith they might buy and secure their victims.

Judas Maccabeus had been making his preparations too for the conflict. He had summoned all the faithful to a day of prayer and fasting. Jerusalem was in the hands of strangers and enemies, but they met at Mispah a few miles distant, "a place where they prayed aforetime in Israel."

There, clothed in black sackcloth, and covered with ashes, they told God of all their fears and sorrows. They laid open before Him the Book of the Law, "wherein the heathen had sought to paint the likeness of their images": they spread the priest's garments before God, for which there was now no use, and they cried in their bitter misery:—"Lo, the heathen are gathered together against us to destroy us: what things they imagine against us, Thou

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knowest. How shall we be able to stand against them, except Thou, O God, be our help?"

It is believed that the seventy-fourth and seventy-ninth Psalms were written during these days of crushing danger and perplexity. For they give an exact picture of the desolation and degradation of the Jewish nation at this time. Living under the rule of such a monster as Antiochus Epiphanes, small wonder was it that to them "all the earth is full of darkness and cruel habitations." "O let the sorrowful sighing of the prisoners come before Thee : according to the greatness of Thy power preserve Thou those that are appointed to die."

Another book that was circulated in those Macca-bean times, though we do not know the exact date at which it was written, was the book of Daniel. The stories of the sufferings of the faithful contained therein (namely, the three children in the fire, Daniel in the lion's den), showing that God never forsakes His own, must have been a marvellous help and comfort to the poor persecuted Jewish Church.

At the close of the united earnest prayer for Divine protection against the Syrian host, Judas, in obedience to God's command, ordered all the newly married men to go home and cheer their wives : he also requested all those who had recently come into property, or were fearful, to depart. By these means his little army of six thousand men had dwindled to three thousand, all badly armed.

Friendly spies now informed Judas that a plot had been made to surprise him, the general Georgias with five thousand footmen, and a thousand picked

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horsemen, meaning to make a forced night march and entrap him and his band of patriots in their present camp.

Judas was a born commander, and he was forthwith inspired to do a splendid piece of strategy. He ordered his soldiers to take an early supper, and then leave their fires all burning brightly, while they on their part marched to the enemies' headquarters. It was an arduous night's work, tramping twenty miles of rough country, crossing deep valleys, and climbing hills clothed with brushwood, till just as dawn was breaking they came in sight of the Syrian camp. During those dark hours they must have passed very close to the soldiers of Georgias, who meant to capture them by one stroke. But Judas Maccabeus knew all the different tracks, and led his little army safely by a less-known path; and all succeeded as he had planned.

The rest of the enemy were peacefully reposing in their halting place, unarmed and unmounted; they were totally unprepared for the terrific onrush of the brave Maccabean soldiers, whom they imagined were miles and miles away from them. The silver trumpets sounded, and the heroes charged, and the Syrians being discomfited, fled into the plain, even as far as the seashore, leaving all their armour, provisions, and riches unprotected behind them, and the ground strewn with their dead.

Judas would allow nothing to be touched, telling his troops, "Be not greedy of the spoil, inasmuch as there is a battle before us." Georgias and his returning warriors would soon be on them. Little

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did the Maccabeans think that, without striking one blow, they would gain the victory.

We must now see what happened to Georgias and his picked men ; when at last they reached the Jews' camp, they found it, as we know, deserted, but the fires still alight. Georgias naturally thought that the enemy had only just fled on hearing of his approach, and were hiding close by ; so all through that night he and his men were trudging up and down the mountains searching for them, till completely wearied out and disappointed they dejectedly made their way back to headquarters, cheering themselves as best they could with the prospect of a good meal and rest.

When they came to the last ridge and looked down on their strongly fortified camp, behold, to their overwhelming astonishment and terror, they saw it deserted by their comrades, and full of smoke from burning tents! Worn out as they were, a panic immediately possessed them, and breaking away from Georgias, they scattered hither and thither in agonized haste, throwing down their weapons as they ran.

Judas with his army pursued them, and slew numbers more of the Syrian host, while most of those who escaped were wounded or maimed.

When Judas led his warriors back from the pursuit, they revisited the Syrian camp, which they spoiled. "They got much gold and silver, blue silk, and purple of the sea, and great riches." "Purple of the sea" or "Tyrian purple," as it is sometimes called, was the deep blood red colour much esteemed by the natives, and garments dyed with it were most

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expensive, as only one drop of the dye was found in the vein of each mollusk or shell fish.

Many of the slave dealers fell into the hands of the Maccabees, and these, in just retribution, were themselves sold into slavery.

The day following the victory of Emmaus being the Sabbath, was spent by the Jewish soldiers in prayer and praise to Almighty God for their great deliverance.

These repeated successes of the brave little army brought them many recruits, and they seem to have harassed and attacked the remaining forces of the enemy that were in the land, killing among others two of their most bitter opponents, who "had annoyed the Jews many ways," and the man who had set fire to the holy gates of the Temple was discovered hiding in a little house, which they burnt over his head; "and so he received a reward meet for his wickedness."

The Syrians became completely disorganized, Nicanor, the Commander-in-Chief, himself escaped to Antioch disguised as a servant, and told the Syrian Court as an excuse for the defeat of his powerful army, that "The God of Israel fought for His people, because they kept His laws, and as long as they did so, they would always have Him for their protector, and no hurt could be done unto them"; and for the remainder of that year no fresh army was sent into Judea.

Lysias, a relation of Antiochus Epiphanes, who had been left in charge of the government during the king's absence in Persia, was nearly beside himself

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at these repeated defeats of the Syrian army by such a handful of Jews ; so he determined once and for all to put an end to these reverses, and he made gigantic preparations for his next expedition against Judas Maccabeus.

He collected an army of sixty thousand foot soldiers, and five thousand cavalry, "all choice men," putting himself at the head of them, and invaded Judea in the year 165 before Christ. His camp was pitched at Bethsura, a village lying south of Jerusalem, where, about a thousand years before, David, the ruddy shepherd boy, had slain the giant Goliath.

This great host, Judas the dauntless went to meet with his little army of ten thousand men. No battle did he undertake without putting himself in the safe-keeping of God ; and now seeing the strength of the enemy, he prayed and said, "Blessed art Thou, O Saviour of Israel, Who didst quell the violence of the mighty man by the hand of Thy servant David : shut up this army in the hand of Thy people Israel : make them of no courage : cast them down with the sword of them that love Thee, and let all those that know Thy Name praise Thee with thanksgiving."

Then he attacked the first of the enemy that appeared, and slew thousands of them, and "thereby became terrible to the rest : " indeed his very presence seemed to unnerve and paralyze his opponents. Lysias must have felt this, for we read that, "observing the manliness of Judas' soldiers, how they were prepared to die rather than lose their liberty, and being afraid of their desperate way of fighting, he

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hastily took the rest of the army back with him to Antioch."

"At each of the three great passes to Jerusalem, the King of Syria's generals had been defeated." If the Jews were to be crushed out, a regular campaign was necessary on a great scale ; for this, preparations were at once begun, as Lysias hoped to carry it through during the ensuing year.

Since the victories of Beth-horon, Emmaus, and Bethsura, Judea was, at all events for a time, free from Syrian interference. Judas Maccabeus felt that now he might indulge his long cherished desire of cleansing the Temple, and restoring the worship of the God he loved and served.

His whole army were with him in this holy desire, and he led them up to Jerusalem full of joy at the thought of again being able to enter their city and Temple. They had to be on their guard though, for the castle built on the hill overlooking the Sanctuary was still in the hands of the enemy, and (shameful to say) its garrison consisted not only of the king of Syria's soldiers, but also of apostate Jews hired by Menelaus, the usurping high priest, who, having denied their God, were now found fighting against their own flesh and blood.

Judas was not strong enough to storm the fortress ; he seems to have had no engines of war. But he sent a detachment of soldiers to surround it, so that none could come forth to hinder the work of restoration.

As the heroic army approached Jerusalem and beheld the havoc their enemies had made, their grief

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was almost overpowering : the walls that Nehemiah and Ezra had dedicated with such joy and thankfulness were utterly thrown down. The city was defiled and ruinous, idol altars and chapels polluted every street. Even sadder still was the sight of their once beautiful Temple. All its ornaments were stripped off : the veil between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies was torn down. "The altar profaned, and the gates burned up, and shrubs growing in the courts as in a forest, or in one of the mountains ; yea, and the priest's chambers thrown down."

The strong men wept like children at all this chaos in that holy spot ; but soon work gave place to sorrow, for much had to be done, and none knew how short their time might be. New gates to the Temple entrances had to be constructed ; the golden candlestick, table of shewbread, and altar of incense were also needed, and Judas took care that they should be made exactly like the former ones ; a thick veil had also to be hung before the Holy of Holies.

First of all, however, all symbols of heathenism must be cleared out of God's House. Judas Maccabeus was very careful to choose priests of blameless character, untainted with Hellenism, to cleanse the inner and more sacred parts of the building ; even in the bewildering haste in which the restoration had to be accomplished, he was reverence itself, the fear of God being ever present with him.

With such an overseer, and with workmen longing to honour God, a wonderful change soon took place.

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The idol altar, with its statue of Jupiter, and all the statues of Antiochus Epiphanes were demolished. The great altar of burnt offering, which had been polluted by a sow being sacrificed on it, was pulled down, and a new altar reared in its place, made of stones, on which no iron tool had been used, according to the commandment of God, found in the twenty-seventh chapter of Deuteronomy.

There was plenty of money for everything: the rich spoils left by the Syrian army and by the thousand slave merchants at Emmaus provided that. So much had they, that gold shields for the walls were constructed, in imitation of those that hung in Solomon's Temple.

In a few weeks all was completed, and the House of Prayer for all nations ready to be re-dedicated after its thorough purification; the furniture was put in its right place, the gates set up, and the new veil hung. The day fixed for this joyous ceremony was December 25th, in the year 165 before Christ. Three years before, on that same day, the first sacrifice had been offered to a heathen idol in the Temple of God. That stain was now wiped away, and from that year till after our Lord's death, when the Jews as a nation were destroyed by the Romans, there was not a break in the Divine Service at Jerusalem. Then its work was done, for the Jewish National Church was merged into the world-wide Catholic Christian Church. The Asmonean family had been the human means of preserving the fire of faith and worship throughout their country.

Great preparations had been made for keeping the

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Dedication Festival as joyously as possible. People from all the villages and towns in Judea came up to share the gladness. Those that lived in Jerusalem illuminated their houses, placing a lighted candle in each doorway, which gave the festival the name of the Feast of Lights as well as the Feast of Dedication.

The day began with the solemn sacrifice of a lamb without blemish on the new altar of burnt offering, according as God had commanded, as a type of the Lamb of God, the Saviour of the world, Who at the right time was going to offer Himself as "the one full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world." They had no sacred fire wherewith to light the wood on the altar and the oil in the seven-branched candlestick, but they would use nothing common, so they dashed two flints against each other till the sparks came thick and fast, and thus was kindled the sacrificial fire, and the smoke of the sacrifice and of the sweet-smelling savour once more ascended up to heaven.

Again the Temple rang with hymns of praise and thanksgiving, and the people bowed their heads to receive God's tender blessing through His priests.

"The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; the Lord make His face to shine on thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."

That which Mattathias had contended for, and died without seeing, had come to pass. It was the glorious victory of the weak, who relied on their

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God, over their mighty heathen oppressors. God's promise spoken by Joshua had been fulfilled, "One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the Lord your God, He it is that fighteth for you."

So joyous an occasion was this restoration of the worship of the Temple that the festival was kept on for eight days, and a rule was made that the Feast of the Dedication should be observed annually. It began every year on our Christmas Day, and lasted till our New Year's Day. The memory of this blessed work of Judas Maccabeus and his fellow-helpers was honoured by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, Who took a special journey in order to be present at this festival.

It was then, while He was walking in the Temple, in Solomon's Porch, that He gave us that comforting assurance: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me, and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand."

As soon as everything was in perfect order at the Temple, priests and Levites in their places, and all restored as it was before, Judas Maccabeus attended to the fortifications of the city. He rebuilt its walls, and finding he could not spare the large number of soldiers necessary for blockading the castle, he fortified the Temple mount, placing a strong wall all round it, with two high towers, and there he placed a guard to watch over the worshippers who came to the Temple, and to prevent their being molested by the heathen in the castle.

The victories of the Maccabean army over the

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Syrians stirred up fear and hatred in the neighbouring nations, and they began to illtreat and slaughter those Jews who were living in their midst, and Judas and his followers had their hands full with the work of rescuing their brethren, and making their power felt around them. No undertaking, however difficult, seemed impossible to the lion-hearted Maccabeus. He proceeded to divide his forces into three divisions, one to be left to defend Judea, one under his brother Simon to march into Galilee, himself taking the most perilous campaign. "He carried his army over the scorching plains of Jericho, descending four thousand feet from Jerusalem, by a rugged mountain path ; forded the rapid stream of Jordan, climbed the stony mountains of Gilead, and marched his men through a hostile and unknown land, providing them with food as best he could, and discovering the rare springs along his line of advance. About a hundred miles of forced marching brought them to the enemy's country. Here a thousand Jews had already been slaughtered, and the heathen threatened to leave not one alive.

All this was changed when the Maccabean army appeared. Vengeance that seems to us barbaric was executed on the inhabitants, but we must remember that most likely it was only by these stern measures that the rest of the Jews could be delivered. Everywhere success attended them, fortress after fortress fell into their hands, and their brethren saved from imminent destruction ; these distant Jews were brought back with the army to Judea, where they could be better defended in the future.

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As soon as they reached their own land, the whole population turned out to meet and cheer the victorious procession, and to speed them on their way.

Success also had followed Simon in his expedition to Galilee: he, with his well-trained soldiers, mastered the first resistance, and after that he marched unopposed through the land, gathering the scattered Jewish families and bringing them back to Judea with him, out of reach of heathen spite and oppression.

While Judas and Simon were thus engaged, their arch-persecutor, Antiochus Epiphanes, died in Persia of a loathsome disease, and in great remorse for his life of wickedness, more especially of his cruelty to the Jews. "Thus the murderer and blasphemer having suffered most grievously, as he entreated other men, so died he a miserable death in a strange country, in the mountains."

Unfortunately, his death did not bring peace to the sorely tried Jews. The Syrian army, with its little ten-year-old king at its head, the son of Antiochus Epiphanes, marched into Judea in the spring of the year 163 before Christ in tremendous force. "The number of his army was an hundred thousand footmen, and twenty thousand horsemen, and two and thirty elephants exercised in battle (these elephants terrified the country people greatly). And to the end they might provoke the elephants to fight, they showed them the blood of grapes and mulberries. Moreover, they divided the beasts among the armies, and for every elephant they appointed a thousand

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men, armed with coats of mail, and with helmets of brass on their heads ; and beside this, for every beast were ordained five hundred horsemen of the best. And upon the beasts were there strong towers of wood ; there were also upon every one strong men that fought upon them, beside the Indian that ruled him. Now when the sun shone upon the shields of gold and brass, the mountains glistened therewith, and shone like lamps of fire."

For once the heroic little Maccabean army, pitted against this strong force, failed.

It was the Sabbatical year (that is, the seventh year when the land kept Sabbath rest) and no sowing and reaping was done, so that provisions were not plentiful. The garrison of Bethsura had to capitulate through hunger, and the fortress fell into the hands of the enemy.

One brave deed of Eleazar, the younger brother of Judas Maccabeus, must be told. He, "perceiving that one of the beasts, armed with royal harness, was higher than all the rest, and supposing that the king was upon him, put himself in jeopardy to the end he might deliver his people, and get him a perpetual name. Wherefore he ran upon him courageously through the midst of the battle, slaying on the right-hand and on the left, so that they were divided from him on both sides. Which done, he crept under the elephant, and thrust him under, and slew him ; whereupon the elephant fell down upon him, and there he died."

Judas, sad at heart, retreated with his men to Jerusalem. Thither also went the Syrian army to

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attack the fortified temple hill. "They set against it artillery with engines, and instruments to cast fire and stones, and pieces to cast darts and slings;" many days were they besieged, so that their provisions were exhausted, and famine stared them in the face. They began to talk of surrendering; in fact, most of the garrison had secretly escaped by the underground passages, and there only remained Judas Maccabeus and his three brothers, and a small band of devoted followers, who, defying the pangs of hunger, still kept to their dangerous posts.

"Man's extremity is God's opportunity." At this moment of utmost distress, when there seemed no possibility of help coming to them, Judas and his starving companions were suddenly and surprisingly relieved.

The commander-in-chief of the Syrian army had news brought him that a rival had appeared to wrest the throne from the boy king, and therefore all available troops were needed at once at Antioch to fight for the cause of his charge, the young son of Antiochus Epiphanes.

He therefore proposed a treaty whereby Judas Maccabeus and his countrymen "might make use of, and live according to the laws of their forefathers. They gladly received his proposals, and when they had gained security upon oath for their performance they went out of the Temple."

When the Syrians entered and saw the strength of the place, contrary to their solemn promise, they had the wall and high towers razed to the ground at once. But this was a trifle compared to the

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glorious terms that had been won. From henceforth, that is from the year 162 before Christ, religious liberty was secured to the Jews. The Holy War ended in victory !

CHAPTER VIII.

“Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord, even so saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours.”

Judas Maccabeus defeated by the Syrians at Bethsura—Religious liberty secured to the Jews—Alcimus, High Priest—Judas Maccabeus gains the Victory of Adasa—The Jews ask the help of Rome—Judas Maccabeus slain in battle—Jonathan, High Priest.

WHEN the Syrian army departed from Judea, they took with them wicked Menelaus as prisoner; for Lysias turned completely against him, and informed the young king that the rebellion of the Jews was owing to the behaviour of this high priest, and that, while he lived, there would always be trouble at Jerusalem. His time had come: he was condemned to suffer the awful Persian death of being thrown headlong into a tower half filled with ashes, which had a wheel turning perpetually to stir the ashes: thus in suffocating agony died the faithless Menelaus.

His successor in the high priesthood, Alcimus, was not a much better man; for he too was a Hellenist at heart. The son of the good Onias III. ought lawfully to have been high priest after his father's death, but perceiving that the Syrian Court

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would never sanction this, he left his native country for good, and settled in Egypt, where the king was very kind to him, and allowed him to build a Temple in imitation of the one at Jerusalem, and in which he ministered as long as he lived. Only lately the foundations of this temple are believed to have been discovered in the excavations that are going on now in Egypt.

The appointment of Alcimus was a bitter grief to all devout Jews, who knew that he cared nothing for their holy religion. He came supported by a Syrian army, whose commander was a stern general named Bacchides; their orders were to slay Judas Maccabeus and his followers.

They went about this work warily, first sending a friendly message to the hero and his brethren, "But they gave no heed to their words." Unfortunately, the chief men at Jerusalem did not show the same common sense, for when Bacchides and Alcimus had solemnly promised they meant no harm to the city and its people, they opened the gates to the Syrian army without opposition. No sooner were the foreigners inside, than they basely murdered sixty of its principal men; and then patrolled the country, putting to death all who had helped the Maccabeans. After which Bacchides returned to Antioch, Alcimus being left with a strong guard to enable him to retain the high priesthood.

Once more that valiant "Warrior of God," Judas Maccabeus, came to the fore; he was determined that the House of God should not again be defiled with heathen practices. He waged war against all

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who espoused the cause of the Hellenist high priest ; and daily he grew stronger, till Alcimus found he possessed only the empty title, while Judas wielded the power, and he fled to the Syrian Court for protection.

A large army, under the command of their old enemy Nicanor, was despatched to trample on the unruly Jews, and make them accept the rule of Alcimus. Judas once more gained a victory, killing many of the Syrians, so that Nicanor retreated to Jerusalem.

Here, according to tradition, the rulers of the opposing armies held a conference, Judas having taken care to place "armed men in convenient places, lest some treachery should be suddenly practised by the enemies."

"They sat side by side on chairs of state. The Syrian general was completely fascinated." "He would not willingly have Judas out of his sight : for he loved the man from his heart."

Peaceable conditions were arranged between them, but this state of affairs did not suit Alcimus, who complained of Nicanor's conduct to the Syrian king. The result was a peremptory command to Nicanor to "send Maccabeus prisoner in all haste to Antioch." "There was no dealing against the king," and, grieved at heart, the general took steps to secure Judas, but he escaped in time with not a few of his men.

Nicanor foiled, "came into the great and holy Temple, and commanded the priests, who were offering their usual sacrifices, to deliver him the man.

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And when they sware that they could not tell where the man was whom he sought, he stretched out his right hand toward the Temple, and made an oath in this manner : If ye will not deliver me Judas as a prisoner, I will lay this Temple of God even with the ground, and I will break down the altar, and erect a notable temple to Bacchus" (the god of wine).

With Jewish curses on his head, he went out to fight the Maccabean troops, little dreaming that he was going to his doom.

Judas, full of confidence in his God, was cheerful in spite of the fearful odds against him ; "thus he armed every one, not so much with defence of shields and spears, as with comfortable and good words," and instructed his followers to make a sudden attack on the Syrians the moment they were within reach, but till then to conceal themselves.

"Maccabeus, seeing the coming of the multitude, and the divers preparations of armour, and the fierceness of the beasts, stretched out his hands towards heaven, and called upon the Lord that worketh wonders, knowing that victory cometh not by arms, but even as it seemeth good to Him. O Lord, Thou didst send Thine angel in the time of Ezekias (Hezekiah), King of Judea, and didst slay in the host of Sennacherib, an hundred fourscore and five thousand ; wherefore now also, O Lord of heaven, send a good angel before us for a fear and a dread unto them, and through the might of Thine arm let those be stricken with terror that come against Thy holy people to blaspheme."

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The fight began, and almost immediately "Nicanor lay dead in his harness." When the soldiers saw their leader fall, they became demoralised and fled in confusion. They found enemies, however, everywhere, for the villagers turned out and helped the Maccabeans to pursue them, and so complete was the rout, that it is said scarcely a man of the Syrian army escaped to bring the tidings of their disaster to Antioch.

It was a brilliant victory for Judas, but, alas ! it was his very last.

The spoils and the prey were gathered together, and the rejoicing Maccabeans prepared to march back to Jerusalem to offer their thanks to God in His Holy Temple. One more thing only remained to be done, and that was to smite off the head of Nicanor which had spoken such blasphemous words, and the right arm "which had been so proudly stretched forth in defiance" against God's Sanctuary, and to bring them away and hang them up toward Jerusalem, "an evident and manifest sign to all of the help of the Lord."

The Romans by this time had become the first power of the world, and even great kingdoms such as Egypt put themselves under her protection. It was to Rome Judas now turned for aid, when he found the Syrians were determined on destroying his nation. He knew the Temple wall was in ruins, and a divided people could never prevail in the end. Divided the Jews then were, the worshippers of God holding to the Maccabean party, and the Hellenists, who followed the ways of the heathen, being traitors to their country, and siding with the Syrians.

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As soon as possible, therefore, he sent two ambassadors to Rome, "which was a very great journey, to make a league and confederacy with them, and to entreat them to take the yoke from them." Little did Judas guess what would happen to his beloved country through the power of this very Roman State only two centuries later ; a doom brought on by the corruptness and unfaithfulness of his own Asmonean descendants !

The two ambassadors arrived safely in Rome and delivered the message : "Judas Maccabeus with his brethren and the people of the Jews have sent us unto you, to make a confederacy and peace with you, and that we might be registered your confederates and friends."

The Romans were delighted with this request ; they wanted to curb the power of Syria ; it was their plan to take the part of a weak state against a strong, because it afforded an opportunity of conquering the mightier of the two. The Roman power was slow and gradual in its conquests, but sure as fate. "It did not fly onward without touching the earth, like the great eastern conquerors, but let it set one claw on a nation, and the doom of that nation was fixed. First, the help of the Romans was asked, and readily granted ; then in return a tribute was demanded and paid ; then the Romans would meddle with the government, till their interference became intolerable, and there was a rising against it, which they called rebellion ; then they sent an army, and ruined the nation for ever, and the conquered land became a Roman province."

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The Senate sent their answer back written on tables of brass. It began :

“Good success to the Romans, and to the people of the Jews, by sea and by land for ever. The sword also and enemy be far from them.” Then followed the terms of the agreement, how the two nations were to help each other in time of war ; and the end contained this reassuring message about the Syrian king : “We have written unto him, saying, Wherefore hast thou made thy yoke heavy upon our friends and confederates the Jews? If, therefore, they complain any more against thee, we will do them justice, and fight with thee by sea and by land.”

A copy of this league was sent to the rulers of all the countries in which were colonies of Jews, Syria, Pergamos, Cappadocia, Parthia, Sparta, Sicyon, Delos, Crete, Samos, Cos, Rhodes, Myndus, Cnidus, Lycia, Pamphilia, Cyprus, Phœnicia, and Cyrene, announcing that the Roman state had taken the Jewish nation under its protection.

How pleased the two ambassadors must have been at the grand success of their mission, and with what light hearts must they have started on their homeward journey with those precious brazen tablets, feeling as if a time of peace and security had already begun for their tempest-tossed country.

Alas ! woeful tidings were awaiting them as they set foot on the shores of Palestine, tidings that must have utterly crushed them ; for their noble leader, the fearless, faithful upholder of their religion and honour, lay, in his splendid manhood, still and mute.

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Never again would they hear his ringing cheer as he urged his soldiers on, or his tender words of sympathy when he comforted such "as were ready to perish." We can hardly realise the overwhelming sorrow that his death caused to every true-hearted Jew: day had indeed turned to black night for them.

This is how it happened: when the king of Syria heard that Nicanor and his troops were overthrown, "he sent Bacchides and Alcimus into Judea the second time, and with them the chief strength of his host," twenty thousand foot soldiers and two thousand horsemen! We cannot be surprised that the hard-worked warriors of the Maccabean army felt their hearts fail them, as, from their position on the heights, they saw "the slingers, and the archers, and the mighty men;" and when day broke Judas' little army of three thousand chosen men had dwindled to eight hundred, the rest having deserted under cover of the darkness: a terrible disappointment to their noble captain on this his last day of earthly life.

It is believed that before this Judas had lost the support of that mighty brotherhood, the Assidians, who had come to him in the wilderness. Their rule was a strictly religious one, to fight for the Temple and its services should they be imperilled. As soon, therefore, as religious liberty had been secured, they withdrew from the contest, national safety and independence being outside their province. Hence the great weakening of the Maccabean forces.

In this supreme hour of danger Judas remained

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brave and resolute. When the faithful remnant of his army came and told him that it would be impossible to win the victory over that immense host, and suggested, "Let us now rather save our lives, and hereafter we will return with our brethren, and fight against them, for we are but few," he answered, "God forbid that I should do this thing, and flee away from them: if our time is come, let us die manfully for our brethren, and let us not stain our honour."

The battle forthwith began, and Judas had the satisfaction of putting to flight the right wing of the enemy, and pursuing them into the mountains; but the left wing perceiving this, followed close on his heels, and trapping him thus between the two hosts, he and his faithful bodyguard were annihilated, the rest of his men saving their lives as best they could.

He died as he had lived, ever battling for the right.

"Then Jonathan and Simon took Judas their brother, and buried him in the sepulchre of his fathers in Modin. Moreover, they bewailed him, and all Israel made great lamentation for him, and mourned many days, saying, 'How is the valiant man fallen, that delivered Israel.'"

Judas Maccabeus died in the spring of the year 161 before Christ; after his death all the wicked and those that transgressed the law of their forefathers sprang up again in Judea. The Hellenistic Alcimus ruled as high priest in undisputed power; and all the friends of the Maccabeans that could be found were

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brought to Bacchides, who tortured them at his pleasure, and then killed them.

It was a time of utter misery, for to add to the horrors of persecution a famine was raging. "So was there a great affliction in Israel, the like whereof was not since the time that a prophet was not seen among them."

The patriotic Jews turned to Jonathan, Judas' younger brother, for him to deliver them out of their wretchedness; he willingly accepted the leadership, and managed to collect an army with which he was constantly harassing the Syrians. John, the gentle-spirited eldest brother, he sent to raise further allies for him, but while on this mission he was treacherously murdered, the third of the sons of Mattathias to die a violent death.

Jonathan and his men would conceal themselves in the wilderness or mountains, and then when least expected would suddenly appear and fall on bodies of the enemy, slaying many of them.

Once, however, they were all but caught themselves, for Bacchides and his soldiers surprised them as they were camping by the river Jordan, and surrounded them; and they only escaped by swimming to the other bank, but before they did this, they slew nearly a thousand of the enemy. Bacchides, fortunately, did not pursue them across the water.

The headquarters of Jonathan's forces was at a little town in the wilderness, which he fortified with strong walls and towers; and here Bacchides and his army besieged him unsuccessfully for many days. At length he made an honourable peace with

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Jonathan, most likely from dread of Roman displeasure, and exchanging captives, he departed with his troops, promising to return no more, which promise he kept.

Jonathan was now master of the situation, except that Jerusalem and several of the largest and strongest fortresses were still in Syrian hands, or worse still, in the hands of apostate Jews. But Jonathan was on the popular side, and the people willingly obeyed him. He moved to Michmash, a few miles north of Jerusalem, and from there governed Judea.

A revolution in the Court at Antioch was a stroke of fortune for him, matters being so pressing there that no one had time to pay attention to the Jews. He used this opportunity by seizing Jerusalem, though he was not strong enough yet to displace the Syrian garrison in the fortress overlooking the Sanctuary.

A little before this Alcimus, the high priest, had died. The pious Jews held that he was struck by the visitation of God as a judgment for making alterations in the Temple. He was cutting down the wall of partition which prevented the Gentiles from entering into the more holy parts of the building, and, while he was in the act of superintending the demolition of this wall, he was seized suddenly with palsy, and died "with great torment." For some years after this the sacred office remained unfilled.

The new claimant of the throne of Syria wishing to bring the Jews over to his side, offered Jonathan

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the high priesthood, "with freedom from all tribute custom of salt, and crown taxes."

Priests in the Jewish Church were not chosen as ours are now, out of any family in the kingdom, and then ordained by the laying on of a bishop's hands. With them the priesthood was hereditary in certain families, that is, it descended from father to son. Mattathias was a priest, and therefore all his sons were priests. The Jews were most careful to have priests only from these priestly families who could trace their descent from Aaron. The high priests, too, were drawn from a special priestly family, with the two exceptions of Eli and Zadok. The reason why Jason, Menelaus, and Alcimus had been tolerated by the bulk of the people, in spite of their unworthiness, was because they belonged to the historic high-priestly family. This was not the case with Jonathan and the Asmonean family, so that when he and his successors assumed the high-priesthood, they greatly shocked the party of the strict Jews and Assideans; though the blessings they had brought to the nation made the majority of Jews overlook the fact that they belonged only to a priestly, not the high-priestly family.

Jonathan himself was much pleased at the appointment, especially as the king with the official purple robe and crown of gold, gave him a valuable present to enable him to repair the Temple and the city walls. Thus with Jonathan began the line of the Asmonean princes, who continued to be high priests in succession until their family became extinct.

Judas Maccabeus had secured religious liberty for

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his people. From Jonathan's time the fighting was for the independence of the Jewish kingdom. Jonathan and his brother Simon were both good men, but their character lacked the splendid single-heartedness of Judas. Very quickly did the love of power demoralize the Asmonean high priests, and it is most grievous to read of the later acts of the family that had such heroes for ancestors.

The disturbances in the Court of Syria grew more frequent and violent, and ruler succeeded ruler. The prudent Jonathan was able to keep friends with each in turn, and from each also to secure privileges for his nation, so that by his wariness and genius he raised Judea from the position of a small and despised state, till it became a power to be reckoned with; but in the midst of his activities and prosperity, his career was cut short by shameful treachery.

A Syrian general named Tryphon wished to make away with his king, who was quite a lad, and reign himself, but Jonathan stood in his way, for he was on good terms with the Syrian Court. And so this wicked man determined to rid himself of Jonathan too, and he came with an army into Judea. Jonathan went forth to meet him with forty thousand men, so powerful had the state become.

Tryphon pretended to be quite surprised at the sight of this host, and said that he had only come on friendly business; he just wanted to tell Jonathan several pieces of good news; that the Syrian force in the citadel of Jerusalem was to be withdrawn, and the town of Ptolemais, which had been promised

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before, was really to be given him. This town was on the sea, and much desired and needed by the Jews, as it possessed one of the few harbours to be found on the coast of Palestine. In Joshua's time it was called Accho, and its present name is Acca.

Besides these friendly messages Tryphon sent very handsome presents. The clever Jonathan was for once taken in, and began friendly meetings with the Syrian general, who at last persuaded him to send back his army and enter Ptolemais with only one thousand men as escort. Jonathan did so, and no sooner had he and his men passed through the city gates than he was imprisoned and loaded with chains, and the thousand Jewish warriors slain to a man.

Tryphon at once began a march on Jerusalem, meaning to seize it. He had taken prisoner the only man capable, he thought, of resisting him, and therefore he should soon succeed in all his plans. Perhaps he imagined Simon (Jonathan's elder brother) to be too old to rise to the emergency ; but he was greatly mistaken.

"Now when Simon heard that Tryphon had gathered together a great host to invade the land of Judea, and destroy it, and saw that the people was in great trembling and fear, he went up to Jerusalem and gathered the people together, and gave them exhortation, saying, Ye yourselves know what great things I, and my brethren, and my father's house, have done for the laws and the Sanctuary, the battles also and troubles which we have seen, by

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reason thereof all my brethren are slain for Israel's sake, and I am left alone.

Now, therefore, be it far from me that I should spare mine own life in any time of trouble, for I am no better than my brethren. Doubtless I will avenge my nation, and the Sanctuary, and our wives, and our children : for all the heathen are gathered to destroy us of very malice."

These brave, calm words of the worthy son of Mattathias brought strength and comfort to the distracted people. Their spirit revived, and they answered with a loud voice, saying, "Thou shalt be our leader instead of Judas and Jonathan thy brother. Fight thou our battles, and whatsoever thou commandest us that will we do."

Simon needed all his energy : he hastened on the fortifications of Jerusalem, and sent a detachment of troops to Joppa to seize it, so that Jerusalem might not be attacked on that side.

Tryphon became uneasy at all this activity. He sent also messages to Simon, saying, that if a hundred talents of silver were sent him, with two of Jonathan's sons as hostages, he would release his brother. Simon knew the man well, and believed not one word of all this. Yet he dared not withhold either the money or the children, lest the people should say he had not done his utmost to get Jonathan freed. His fears were only too well founded, for Tryphon took the money and the boys, and then murdered Jonathan, and it is believed the two little lads also.

"And all Israel made great lamentation for him,

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and bewailed him many days:" rightly too, for eighteen long, arduous years had he worked for their good, and succeeded marvellously in raising their national position.

CHAPTER IX.

“The Children Free.”

Simon, Leader of the Jews—Simon captures the Castle at Jerusalem—The Jews coin their own Money—National Testimonial to Simon—The Pharisees and Sadducees.

THE state of the Syrian garrison shut up in the citadel of Jerusalem was desperate, after that Simon had fortified the city. No supplies of food could reach them, and they were literally starving. The only chance of life was the arrival of Tryphon with his troops, and for this they eagerly watched. At last they managed to get a messenger through unperceived, who, coming to Tryphon's camp, implored him to succour them at once ; and showed him that he could do so successfully, by choosing the undefended mountain and desert route along which to march.

So desperate was their case that Tryphon determined that very night to despatch his cavalry and attack Jerusalem ; and most likely he would have succeeded in capturing it, but just then came on a heavy snowstorm, which completely blocked up the narrow mountain paths, and thus proved a better defence to the city than any host of men.

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Tryphon had to give up the attempt and retire to his own land, where his next act was to kill the young king of Syria, under pretence of a surgical operation. Truly those were terrible times to live in; lying, treason, torture, murder, and unspeakable wickedness were raging in every country. We who live in Christian times are not half grateful enough for our quiet rest, and safe happy homes, and peaceful surroundings.

As soon as the wretched Tryphon had departed, Simon sent, and took the body of Jonathan, his brother, and buried it in Modin, the city of his fathers. He erected a grand monument over the graves of his parents and four brothers. So high was it, that it could be seen far away at sea. It was built of hewn stone, and consisted of seven pyramids. One of the seven was evidently for himself, and round these pyramids ran a colonnade, and "cunning devices" ornamented it all.

In the explorations that are continually going on in Palestine, it is much hoped that this tomb may be discovered, but no traces of it have as yet been found.

Simon must have been greyheaded when he accepted the leadership of the Jews, for it was twenty-five years since his father's death, and at the time that occurred both he and his younger brothers were full-grown men; but if he was old in years, his spirit was fresh and active, and he had four capable, energetic sons to help him in his undertakings.

So splendidly did Simon manage the affairs of

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the nation, that under him Judea grew into a powerful independent state, and in this way he gained the unbounded love of his people.

The wicked Tryphon was still usurping the kingly power of Syria, when Simon sent word to the rightful sovereign that he would support him in his efforts to ascend his throne. With his letter he gave the king a scarlet robe and crown of gold. The reply which he received was very acceptable, for it was a recognition both of him as high priest and the nation over whom he ruled.

“King Demetrius unto Simon the high priest, and friend of kings, as also unto the elders and nation of the Jews sendeth greeting.” He then went on to say that he was ready to make a lasting peace with them, allowing them to keep all their fortresses, and freeing them completely from paying any taxes to the Court of Syria, thereby virtually acknowledging their independence. “Thus the yoke of the heathen was taken away from Israel.” This was indeed good news, and the Great Council agreed that there should be an annual half-holiday in commemoration of their freedom.

There was still, however, fighting to be done. The strong cities of Bethsura and Gaza had not submitted to Simon, so he besieged them, and while surrounding Gaza he seems to have procured some wonderful engine of war, from the tower of which his soldiers “leaped into the city: whereupon there was a great uproar in the city: insomuch as the people of the city rent their clothes, and climbed upon the walls with their wives and children, and cried with a

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loud voice, beseeching Simon to grant them peace."

He allowed them to go unharmed out of the town, and then he had their houses thoroughly cleansed from all pollution, casting out the idols, and "so entered with songs and thanksgivings."

But his greatest triumph was when he gained possession of the strong fortress overlooking the Temple which Tryphon had left to its fate. Simon kept the Syrian and Hellenist garrison "so strait, that they could neither come forth, nor go into the country, nor buy, nor sell: wherefore they were in great distress for want of victuals, and a great number of them perished through famine."

At last they capitulated, and Simon allowed the hunger-stricken survivors to leave the castle, and then with every sign of exuberant joy, "because there was destroyed a great enemy out of Israel," with thanksgiving and branches of palm trees, and with harps, and cymbals, and with viols, and hymns, and songs, they entered into it.

Never again should their beloved Temple be overshadowed by the hateful walls and towers of this castle. For three long years the people worked hard, removing every portion of the building that reared itself above the Holy House. Only those walls, courts and halls that were below the Sanctuary were allowed to remain.

The garrison were given a few days in which to make good their escape, then the Hellenistic Jews who remained were told they must return to the faith of their forefathers or suffer the penalty of death.

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It was not long before Simon gained the right of coining money, the special mark of independence. In the British Museum you may see some of his coins, with inscriptions on them in the ancient Hebrew characters. The most frequent are "Shekel of Israel," "Jerusalem the Holy." Other coins have "Simon Prince of Israel," "The First Year of the Deliverance of Israel," "The Redemption of Sion." On these are pictures of the pot of manna, which God told Moses to preserve in remembrance of the miraculous food the Israelites received when journeying through the wilderness those forty years; "so man did eat angels' food, for He gave them bread from heaven to eat." There were also pictures of Aaron's wonderful rod that budded and bare almonds. These coins were all silver ones; the Jews never coined gold.

Not since the carrying away of the nation to Babylon, about four centuries before, had the Jews been able to prove themselves a free nation. Now they could do so; it was the topmost pinnacle of their prosperity, and, if it were possible, raised Simon even higher in his people's admiration than he had been before.

It almost makes one sad to have to note that he renewed the league of friendship with Rome. To us who know the history of later days, it looks like inviting the thunderbolt to fall and destroy the fair prospect. But, of course, to Simon it seemed the wisest policy to enlist as friends that mighty nation.

The Romans, as usual, were pleased at the renewal of the league, and most likely pleased, too, at the

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handsome present that the Jewish ambassadors brought with them, for it was nothing less than a great shield of gold of a thousand pounds weight! No wonder we read that the ambassadors were "entertained honourably," for the Romans dearly loved money.

Stronger and stronger grew the enthusiasm of the Jewish people for their Governor, High Priest, and Captain. "For he sought the good of the nation in such case, as that evermore his authority and honour pleased them well: he was honourable in all his acts. He made peace in the land, and Israel rejoiced with great joy. The ancient men sat all in the streets, communing together of good things, and the young men put on glorious and war-like apparel. He provided victuals for the cities, and set in them all manner of munition, so that his honourable name was renowned unto the end of the world."

His countrymen asked one another, "What thanks shall we give to Simon and his sons? For he, and his brethren, and the house of his fathers have established Israel, and chased away in fight their enemies from them, and confirmed their liberty."

They consulted together, and in a great assembly held in the largest court of the Temple, September 18th, in the year 141 before Christ, agreed on giving Simon a national testimonial.

They made tablets of brass on which were recorded all the great things he had done for his people: how he fought for them, and spent much of his own substance, and armed the valiant men of his nation

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and gave them wages, and fortified the towns, and kept justice and faith to his nation, and exalted his people by all means. Also it stated that he was to be clothed in purple and gold : neither people nor priest were to gainsay his words, or to gather an assembly in the country without him, or to be clothed in purple, or wear a buckle of gold." Very quaint some of the resolutions are, but they show plainly that Simon had become the hero of his nation.

The brazen tablets, after being inscribed, were fastened to pillars in a conspicuous place in Mount Zion.

One sentence of the inscription deserves special mention, as it gives us a glimpse of the general expectation the Jews had of the coming of their Messiah. It was this, "Also that the Jews and priests were well pleased that Simon should be their governor and high priest for ever, UNTIL THERE SHOULD ARISE A FAITHFUL PROPHET."

We see in the New Testament over and over again how strong this feeling was. We read in the second chapter of St. Luke's Gospel how the aged Simeon was "waiting for the consolation of Israel," and how the widowed Anna spake of the Lord Jesus, "to all them that looked for redemption ;" and of Joseph of Arimathea, it is said, "he waited for the kingdom of God. Through all the gross wickedness that prevailed on earth during the centuries just preceding the birth of Christ, there were still God's elect, speaking often one to another and anxiously expecting the Saviour Who would bring

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in the reign of peace and love, "THE PROPHET Who should come into the world."

It was under Jonathan and Simon's rule that we hear for the first time the name of Pharisee, and a few years afterwards that of Sadducee, with both of which nowadays we are so familiar, through reading the New Testament. We find them there called "the sect of the Pharisees," and "the sect of the Sadducees;" but we must not think that they had separated themselves from the Jewish Church, as the sect of the Baptists, or the sect of the Congregationalists have separated themselves from the Holy Catholic Church. In the Temple at Jerusalem, Pharisee and Sadducee were found worshipping side by side, and attending the Jewish Fasts and Festivals. They were all members of the one Church, though they held opinions sometimes very different to each other.

The Pharisees are supposed by some to be a portion of that body of men who helped Judas so much in the beginning of the Maccabean struggle; they were then called the Assideans. At all events many of their ideas were alike, and after the rise of the Pharisees we find the name of Assidean no longer mentioned.

The Pharisees at that time were "the noblest guardians and representatives of Judaism"; men full of zeal for God, moral and upright, strict in their observance of the Law, the Sabbath day and Temple worship, and firm in resisting Hellenistic innovations. They also laid great stress on paying their tithes and other religious dues, and also in obeying all

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God's rules about cleanliness and ceremonial purity. So anxious were they to do exactly what was commanded, that they drew up a book of regulations to enable them to accomplish this, and named it a "Hedge to the Law." But this beautiful beginning soon became marred. They forgot the grace of humility completely in their hedges, though in the Scriptures they professed to be so anxious to obey it was written, "Thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, Whose name is holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit."

Little by little spiritual pride crept in and tainted all the religion of the Pharisees, and at length they thought themselves so good and learned, that they looked down on everyone else. Pride showed itself in their teaching too, for besides the Holy Scriptures, the Tradition of the Elders, that is, the traditions which Moses was said to have delivered to the children of Israel by word of mouth, they declared were to be believed and obeyed as much as God's written Word, or even more so! This was a terrible error, and brought on them the Lord's just rebuke, "Ye have made the Word of God of none effect through your traditions." And St. Paul says that they thus, "going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God," and so they grew into a set of formalists, whose religion was only a cloak for hypocrisy, who lived and loved to be honoured by men, and called Rabbi, Rabbi (my great one, my great one), but who cared nothing for the praise of God.

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Wherever they walked they could be recognised by their dress and behaviour. The phylacteries, which were only worn by ordinary Jews on solemn occasions, were worn by the Pharisees all day long : these were little leather boxes containing texts of Scripture, which they bound on their forehead and on the left arm near the heart, and which they "made broad, to be seen of men"; for the same reason too, they enlarged "the borders of their garments." Then whenever their time of prayer came, whether they were in the act of mounting a horse, the foot would be withdrawn from the stirrup, or in the midst of a jostling crowd, they would suddenly stop and bend so low "till the skin over the heart would fall into folds." Nothing must disturb them then, even "the twisting of a serpent around one's heels must remain unheeded!" But all was for outward show, and our Lord warns His disciples, "When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are : for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men ; verily they have their reward."

Their cleanliness, about which they were so particular, that it was a common saying that the Pharisees would wash the sun's face if they could get at it, was all for show too, and brought down another rebuke from the Lord Jesus : "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for ye make clean the outside of the cup and platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess." We can understand better His scorn of their ceremonial

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purity, when we read of a Pharisee father refusing to comfort and support his own son in his hour of agony, when the surgeon was amputating his limb, for fear of accidentally coming in contact with the severed flesh, which then would be a dead body, and defile him !

The Pharisees also spoilt the rest and happiness which God intended His children to enjoy on the Sabbath day, by their minute and wearisome rules concerning the keeping of it holy.

No burden whatever was to be borne on that day. But what was a burden? The learned Rabbis had a heated discussion as to whether a man who had a wooden leg might be allowed to carry it on the Sabbath ! And they failed to come to an agreement on the point. Then two theological colleges argued seriously as to whether it would be breaking the Sabbath to eat an egg that a hen had laid on that day ! This weighty question they also were unable to decide.

We smile as we read such things, but it shows how spirituality departs when man sets himself and his wisdom above the Almighty God.

One of the reasons which turned the Pharisees into our Lord's deadliest enemies, was because He more than once performed His works of mercy on the Sabbath day. When He healed the withered right hand of a man in the Synagogue at Capernaum on the Sabbath, He before doing this put a question to the Pharisees who were watching the scene "that so they might accuse Him." He longed to open their spiritual understanding, and instil life into their

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dead religion, so He said, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath day or to do evil? to save life or to kill?" They could only have given one answer if they had been true children of the God of mercy, whom they professed to serve. "But they held their peace. And when He had looked round about on them in anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, He saith unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored whole as the other."

This miracle of love filled the Pharisees with madness, and "they straightway took counsel how they might destroy Him." They felt He read them through and through, and knew all their vanity, and littleness, and insincerity, and this it was that caused them to hate Him with such bitter hatred.

Never once do we read of our Lord bestowing a word of praise on them as a body; and yet, whenever it was possible, He loved to dwell on the least speck of goodness that He could find in people. To the Canaanitish woman who came praying for her afflicted daughter's cure, He granted her request with the words: "O woman, great is thy faith." To the blind man outside Jericho He declared, "Thy faith hath made thee whole." The sinful woman was forgiven, "for she loved much." But for the Pharisees there is only stern rebuke from the gentle Saviour's lips.

Yet there were individuals among them who were true servants of God; Nicodemus, the timid ruler of the Jews, was one of these, he who came to Jesus by night for instruction, and who later boldly took

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Christ's part in the Great Council or Sanhedrin ; and when the scribes and Pharisees and priests had done their worst, and had crucified the Lord of glory, Nicodemus dared all ceremonial defilement in his love and devotion, and, with Joseph of Arimathea, helped to lay the Sacred Form in its rocky grave.

Saul of Tarsus, too, "a Pharisee of the Pharisees," became the Lord's chosen vessel to "bear His Name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel."

St. James, the writer of the Epistle bearing his name, was said to belong to the sect of the Pharisees. His prayerful, spotless life made him respected by Jew as well as Christian. Gamaliel, Saul's teacher, "a doctor of the Law, had in reputation among all the people," and who wisely warned the Sanhedrin against slaying the apostles, "lest haply ye be found to fight against God," was also a Pharisee.

The Sadducees were not nearly as popular with the mass of the people as the Pharisees: for one reason, they belonged to the aristocracy and behaved haughtily to those around them. They were the generals and statesmen of the nation, who, having travelled more and met people of different views and laws, were not so devoted to strict Judaism: they openly announced that they believed in only the Pentateuch, that is, in the first five books in the Bible, and as no angel, or spirit, or resurrection of the body was mentioned in these, there existed no such thing. For this wilful unbelief they too were rebuked by the Lord Jesus, who proved the

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truth of the resurrection to them out of those very five books of Moses which they accepted.

He told them: "As touching the resurrection of the dead that they rise; have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err."

The Sadducees were strongly opposed to the Pharisees. They quarrelled on numerous points. The Pharisees insisted on the national sacrifices being paid for out of the general Temple treasury fund: the Sadducees were angry at this, and said the zeal and generosity of private individuals ought to provide them. The dates of several feasts was another cause of discussion, also the amount of punishment to be meted out to offenders.

So bitter grew the feeling between the two parties, that in the time of Simon's grandsons it led to civil war, that worst scourge that can befall any country. Happily for Simon, no trace of such a calamity appeared in his lifetime.

CHAPTER X.

“ Lo, these are the ungodly, these prosper in the world.”

Murder of Simon and most of his Family by his Son-in-Law—John Hyrcanus, High Priest—Schismatical Temple on Mount Gerizim Destroyed—Aristobulus, High Priest and King of the Jews—Alexander Jan-næus, High Priest and King.

EVERYTHING concerning Judea seemed most prosperous in the year 135 before Christ.

Simon, the princely high priest, was adored by his people, and respected by the countries around. Peace and comfort reigned everywhere, when suddenly the whole nation was plunged into mourning by a shameful crime—nothing less than the murder of Simon with most of his family.

A daughter of Simon's was married to a man named Ptolemy, who secretly craved the sovereignty of Judea himself, and to secure this devised a plan of destroying all his wife's relations. He, therefore, invited his unsuspecting father and mother-in-law to a grand family reception in his castle near Jericho. They accepted the invitation and went with two of their sons, the younger one, John Hyrcanus, not accompanying them to the feast.

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Everything proceeded merrily till the banquet was nearly over, when, at a given signal, armed men, who had been hid in the hall, sprang up and slew Simon and both of his sons, and several of his servants; the old mother was spared, but imprisoned; happier would it have been for her had she fallen then by the assassin's hand.

That same night Ptolemy sent a troop of horse to murder the remaining son, but he was not permitted fully to carry out his wicked plot. A faithful follower of Simon's outstript the soldiers and fled to John Hyrcanus, telling him of the terrible fate of his family, and warning him in time of the plan made for his own destruction.

"Hereof when he heard he was sore astonished," but Asmonean blood ran in his veins, and grief was not allowed to master him. When the murderers arrived, instead of surprising him, they met their own death doom. Hyrcanus then hastened at full speed to Jerusalem, as he knew well his brother-in-law would lose no time in attempting to capture it. He was gladly welcomed by the inhabitants and recognized as his father's successor in the government. Having seen to its defences, he marched off at once to punish Ptolemy for his gross treachery and bloodshed.

But that monster's cup of wickedness was not yet full. Fearing he might be overcome by the enraged soldiers of the Judean army, he invented "a fiendish scheme."

The aged mother of John Hyrcanus, as you remember, had been imprisoned by Ptolemy when

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her husband was murdered. He now brought her half clothed on to the castle walls, in sight of her son and his troops, and had her terribly scourged, shouting to the besiegers that if they did not depart he would throw her headlong from the walls. The brave woman besought her son not to think of her agonies, but to avenge the death of his father and brothers. No one can blame him for not heeding her request.

When he beheld her beaten, and torn to pieces, his nerve failed him, and he withdrew his men from blockading the castle. It was all of no avail, for Ptolemy ended by murdering her, and thankful must the poor soul have been to have escaped by death from such scenes of pain and horror.

One cannot help wondering how the wife of Ptolemy felt towards the husband who could thus torture and kill those nearest and dearest to her; but of this we are told nothing. Ptolemy himself escaped out of Judea, and history mentioned his name no more.

Syria, the old enemy of the Jews, at the news of Simon's death, woke up to all her former activity against Judea, under the impression that now it could be easily annexed. The king marched through the land with a large army, burning and destroying as he went. He was too powerful for John Hyrcanus to meet in the open, so he retired to Jerusalem, which was so strongly fortified that he trusted he could defy the enemy, and by degrees harass them and compel them to withdraw.

Seeing the strength of the place, the Syrians

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determined to starve the garrison out. They made seven camps round, and dug two large ditches so that none could escape out of the city. One hundred towers were also erected, three storeys high, with soldiers placed in them who daily attacked the Jews.

Poor Jerusalem suffered terribly during this year of siege. At one time there was even a probability of water running short, but a bountiful thunder shower came just at the right time and filled their reservoirs. The provisions grew scantier and scantier, and it looked as if they would all die of famine. Hyrcanus therefore turned out of the city all except those who were in the flower of their age and fit for war. The poor creatures who were shut out of Jerusalem perished miserably, many of them, between the walls and the enemy's ditch, which the Syrians forbade them to cross. But when the Feast of the Tabernacles was at hand, a sort of joyous family festival like our Christmas, the relations inside the walls could not bear to see their sufferings any longer, and readmitted the survivors, in spite of the risk they all had then of dying by hunger.

The king of Syria who was besieging them was, fortunately, a very different type from Antiochus Epiphanes, and when John Hyrcanus sent to ask him for a truce of seven days, in order to keep the Festival properly, he not only granted it, but "besides that sent in a magnificent sacrifice, bulls with their horns gilded, with all sorts of sweet spices, with cups of gold and silver. For this Antiochus, all men called Antiochus the Pious, for the great zeal he had about religion."

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Hyrcanus after receiving this kindness resolved to come to terms with the king, who no doubt was pleased too at the thought of ending the long siege, for there was much sickness amongst his soldiers, owing to their lack of fresh water.

A settlement was agreed on, humiliating to the Jews, but the best that could be obtained under the circumstances. The Judean troops were to give up their arms, pay tribute, give hostages, and a sum of five hundred talents of silver : one thing they utterly refused to do, and that was to admit a Syrian garrison again in Jerusalem ; but on accepting the rest of the conditions, the Syrian king withdrew his army, taking with him as hostage the young son of John Hyrcanus as well as many others. Before leaving he had the city walls entirely destroyed.

A few years later, however, the tide turned, and Hyrcanus and his people again became independent of Syria. In the year 128 before Christ, Antiochus the Pious fell in battle ; and from the time of his death the land of Syria was a mass of civil war, intrigue, and unrest, and could not therefore interfere with foreign affairs. John Hyrcanus in consequence ceased to pay tribute, or furnish troops for its armies, and he devoted his time and energies in establishing on a sure basis the state over which he ruled.

He hired soldiers from other countries, in fact, had a standing army : this greatly grieved the faithful Jews ; they valued most the high priesthood, while Hyrcanus cared most for the temporal power that accompanied it. All the same, he won popularity from several of his exploits.

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To the intense joy of the whole Jewish nation he marched to Samaria, subdued it, and completely demolished the schismatic temple on Mount Gerizim, which for over two hundred years had been a grief of mind to every pious Jew. "Unlike the Onias temple in Egypt, it had claimed to be the only rightful temple in existence. It was the defiant and intolerant rival of the Sanctuary at Jerusalem. The day of its destruction was therefore a day of great rejoicing in Judea."

Hyrchanus also conquered Edom and compelled its inhabitants to become members of the Jewish Church, or else be exiled from their country. They chose to live according to the laws of the Jews, and from henceforth were generally reckoned as one nation, though they were only called half-Jews by many of the faithful. This union of the Edomites, the descendants of Esau, and the Jews, the descendants of Jacob, brought, later on, terrible disaster on their country.

John Hyrchanus (as we should naturally expect), being the grandson of Mattathias, belonged to the Pharisees (or strict party among the Jews), till, near the latter end of his reign, they managed to offend him very deeply.

The occasion was this: he had invited the chief Pharisees, by whom he was deeply loved, to a feast at which "he entertained them very kindly: when he saw them in a good humour, he began to say to them that they knew he was desirous to be a righteous man, and to do all things whereby he might please God. However, he desired, that if

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they observed him offending in any point, and going out of the right way, they would call him back and correct him." A rather dangerous thing for the holiest person to say, no one being perfect, but still more dangerous to act on, as one of the party soon found.

The bulk of the guests at once replied that Hyrcanus was "entirely virtuous." This pleased him very much, when suddenly his smiles died away, for a voice was heard saying, "Since thou desirest to know the truth, if thou wilt be righteous in earnest, lay down the high priesthood and content thyself with the civil government of the people."

This was the feeling among most of the Pharisees, but Eleazar was the only one who dared utter it. It is at this point that we first meet with the sect of the Sadducees. One of them, who was a friend of Hyrcanus, suggested his asking the Pharisees what punishment Eleazar deserved for reproaching the high priest. They made answer, "Stripes and bonds, but that it did not seem right to punish reproaches with death." A very proper answer, but Hyrcanus was angry at it. He thought the Pharisees did not sufficiently resent the insult he had received, and he left their sect and went over to the Sadducees, a most unpopular step with his subjects.

Thus a body of men who were pleased with many heathen customs, and desired to live a less strict life, came once more into power in Judea.

Shortly after this John Hyrcanus died. He had been a mighty prince, conquering Samaria, Edom,

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and Philistia, and thus raising his country to a great power. But the spirituality of the older generation was lacking in him. The very money he coined showed self-glorification; he abandoned the modest example of his father, and allowed his own name to appear on them, "Jochanan, High Priest," and "John, High Priest, and Head of the Judean Commonwealth."

But it is when we read of the doings of his children we are filled with amazement and horror at the rapid degeneracy of the family of such saints of God as were Mattathias and Judas Maccabeus.

Yet through these times of worldly ambition and war, and strife of Pharisee with Sadducee, and Sadducee with Pharisee, there were still, as we have seen in every generation, the godly remnant left in the land, who, sighing at the present evil, looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, the Righteous One. The Book of Enoch, which appeared about this time, plainly shows this. It is supposed to record the visions of that "mysterious solitary saint of the antediluvian period, who walked with God and was not, for God took him." It is full of most beautiful passages, especially those in which the "Chosen One," the "Son of Man," is to judge the world, and to make all that seems unjust and perplexing now, to be right and true.

St. Jude in his epistle quotes from this book: "Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, 'Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all; and to convince all that are ungodly among

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them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him,'” St. Peter also quoted from it, and in the Revelation of St. John the Divine, the description of the judgment is taken from it; “I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from Whose face the earth and the heaven fled away.”

The character of the Messiah found in the book of Enoch is very striking: “I asked the angel who went with me and showed me all the hidden things, concerning that Son of Man, Who He was, and whence He was, and why He went with the Head of Days? And he answered and said unto me, ‘This is the Son of Man Who hath righteousness, with Whom dwelleth righteousness, and Who revealeth all the treasures of that which is hidden, because the Lord of spirits hath chosen Him, and His lot before the Lord of spirits hath surpassed anything in uprightness for ever. He will be the Light of the Gentiles, and the hope of those that are troubled in heart. All who dwell on earth shall fall down and bow the knee before Him, and will bless and laud and celebrate with song the Lord of spirits. The Lord of spirits will abide over them, and with that Son of Man will they eat, and lie down, and rise up for ever and ever. There is near Him a spring of righteousness which never fails, and round it are springs of wisdom; and all that are thirsty drink of these springs, and become full of wisdom and have their habitations with the righteous, the chosen, and the holy.’”

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Imagine the blessings of calm and strength that must have fallen on the troubled worshippers of God in the evil times that were coming, nay, indeed, had already come, to their nation, as they read these visions of assured righteousness and happiness; it was indeed "good news from a far country."

Three of the books of the Apocrypha were also written at this time, "Judith," "The History of Susanna," and the "First Book of the Maccabees;" the latter is said to be a model as to how history ought to be chronicled.

When John Hyrcanus died, he was succeeded by his eldest son Aristobulus in the year 105 before Christ. His father had left him only the high priesthood, and had bequeathed the civil government to his wife, but Judea had not yet got accustomed to the Greek custom of a female ruler, so without disturbance, Aristobulus was able to displace his mother and claim the full sovereignty himself.

He was very ambitious, and was the first to put a diadem on his head and to take the title of "King of the Jews."

When his mother protested at his usurping her authority, he threw her into prison, and, it is said, starved her to death. He also imprisoned his other brothers, except Antigonus, whom he loved tenderly, and allowed him to assist in affairs of state.

The two brothers were engaged together in subduing "Galilee of the Gentiles," probably a campaign begun by their father Hyrcanus. After a very short time Aristobulus fell so ill that he had to return home, leaving Antigonus commander-in-chief; he

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managed most successfully, conquering the semi-barbarian inhabitants, and forcing them, as his father had the Edomites, to become members of the Jewish Church. "Thus was created that Galilee which we know in our Gospels—a region whose population was Jewish in belief and practice, but Gentile in a large degree in descent."

It was from Galilee that St. Peter and St. Andrew and other of our Lord's Apostles came, and during our Lord's trial, St. Peter was recognised by his dialect as coming from these parts: "Thou art a Galilean, and thy speech agreeth thereto."

"This part of the work of the Asmonean dynasty, preparing, as it did, the field for Christ, was perhaps of all that they did in the world, the thing of most durable consequence for the history of mankind.

Having thus brilliantly carried out his orders and gained fresh territory for Judea, Antigonus returned with his troops to Jerusalem. He arrived in the midst of the great Feast of Tabernacles, and the young victorious general, full of joy and thankfulness, marched straight with his bodyguard up the Temple steps to give thanks to God for the victory he had gained.

The news of the return of the triumphant warriors was soon brought to the sickroom of the young king. His wife had been always jealous of the favour shown to this beloved brother, and was continually trying to poison her husband's mind against him. Now she suggested that he meant treason by coming fully armed with his guards so close to the royal castle.

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Aristobulus would not at first entertain such a suspicion, but urged by his wife he consented to a message being sent to Antigonus, asking him to come and visit the invalid unarmed. At the same time soldiers were posted in the dark underground passage leading from the Temple to the Palace, through which he would have to pass, with orders that if Antigonus went by unarmed, they were to remain concealed, but should he be armed, they were to fall on him, and slay him on the spot.

Then the king sent a secret message to his brother to be sure and come unarmed, for he truly loved him. His wife undertook to see it faithfully delivered, but instead of doing this, it is reported that she caused a royal command to be delivered to Antigonus, summoning him at once into the king's presence in full armour. Unsuspectingly he entered that dark passage with a step full of health and vigour, pleased at the thought of telling his brother how their Galilean plans had succeeded. Five minutes later he lay on the rocky floor, bathed in his own blood, foully slain.

The young king never recovered from his sickness, and the end was hastened by grief; his last days were passed in agonies of remorse, and his last words were piteous moans about "those I have so wickedly murdered." His reign had lasted one short year.

Alexander-Jannaeus, his brother, succeeded him in the year 104 before Christ, a far more wicked man than Aristobulus. "For twenty-six years Alexander-Jannaeus fought, intrigued, and murdered, in the

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pursuit of his selfish ambitions, and won for himself a place among the reprobates of Jewish history."

He began by putting one of his brothers to death. He was bitterly opposed to the Pharisees, and they to him, for he was a Hellenist in all his tastes ; even the coins of his reign had Greek writing on them. We cannot be surprised at the aversion the Pharisees felt towards him, for he, the high priest, called to the most solemn office on earth, was a man whom none could honour, his evil life was too well known.

He turned their reverence of holy things into ridicule ; once, at the Feast of Tabernacles, as he was standing officiating in the Temple, instead of pouring the water, the sign of fruitfulness, into the silver funnel of the altar, he threw it contemptuously on the ground, at the same time blasphemously scoffing at the ceremony. The indignation and rage of his subjects then burst forth. They could no longer bear with him. Their part in the Feast was to carry branches of palms and citron trees in their hands ; the ripe lemons still hanging on the boughs were now plucked off in their frenzy and thrown at the offending high priest.

A shocking massacre followed, for Alexander-Jannæus called out his well-paid foreign bodyguard, and set them on the unarmed multitude. When their work was done, six thousand dead bodies lay piled up in the Temple Courts !

This barbarous act brought about civil war ; and it is believed that during the six years it lasted, quite fifty thousand persons perished. Pharisee fought Sadducee, and Sadducee fought Pharisee. At length

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Jannaeus himself got weary of the bloodshed, and asked the Pharisees what he could do to conciliate them. In their bitter agony and misery, they could only cry out, "Kill thyself!"

Our sympathies would have been entirely with the Pharisees, had they not in their despair turned traitor to their country, and called in the aid of Syria. But patriotism had not quite been crushed out, and when the Syrian arms were on the point of victory, six thousand of the Pharisees deserted, and went over to Jannaeus' side, after which the foreigners withdrew their help.

Alexander-Jannaeus took a terrible revenge on those who had opposed him. He caused about eight hundred of the principal Pharisees to be crucified, while he himself held a feast of shame on the walls of Jerusalem, in full view of their agonies. But not content with this, before the eyes of these poor sufferers, while they were still alive and breathing on the crosses, he ordered the executioners to cut the throats of their wives and children.

This frightful spectacle gained for him the nickname of "The Savage"; but it did its work; from henceforth he was not troubled with rebellion at home.

The six thousand Jewish soldiers who had fought against him all fled away that night, and remained exiles as long as he lived.

Alexander-Jannaeus hastened his own end by hard drinking; that and fighting and killing were his only pleasures. He built several fortresses during his campaigns; one was Machaerus, that gloomy castle

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near the Dead Sea, where John the Baptist was martyred. It was placed on a towering height, and all round it were deep ravines, so that it was considered impregnable.

Though weakened by his wicked habits, he still insisted on continuing his warlike expeditions, and while away on one of these he died.

His wife and children arrived at his dying bed in time to see him alive and receive his last instructions.

"To whom dost thou leave me and my children?" she anxiously asked, "who are destitute of all other supports, and this when thou knowest how much ill-will thy nation bear thee?" Jannaeus had to hear plain truths from his wife even on his death-bed!

He then gave her sound advice for her own security on the throne, and that of her children. He told her to keep his death secret from the army till she had returned to Jerusalem and taken possession of the citadel. Then she was to throw herself on the protection of the Pharisees, as they were the strong popular party, and ask them to take the government in hand. Their leader, indeed, was her own brother Simeon, son of Shetach.

She followed out her husband's directions, and, as he had told her, the Pharisees, in their delight at thus once more getting into power, gave their former persecutor, Alexander-Jannaeus, a funeral more splendid than any of his predecessors. He left two sons, Hyrcanus and Aristobulus, but his wife Alexandra was to reign as Queen.

CHAPTER XI.

“ They draw nigh that of malice persecute me, and are far from Thy Law.”

Salome-Alexandra, Queen—Hyrcanus II., High Priest—Aristobulus seizes the Government—Civil War—Onias, the man of prayer, martyred—Pompey visits Jerusalem—Hyrcanus II. restored to his High Priesthood—The Publicans.

“ IT was a great thing for the Judean nation that a woman of gentle nature and sincere piety should have been called to the head of the State after it had been torn asunder by the recklessness of its former ruler.”

Queen Salome-Alexandra, of course, being a woman, could only rule as Civil Governor, and her eldest son, Hyrcanus, became high priest. He was a quiet youth, who allowed the Pharisees to do what they pleased, and all went smoothly in the Temple services ; and a succession of good harvests did much towards restoring cheerfulness to the land about this time.

The one great difficulty the queen experienced was to restrain the Pharisees from taking vengeance on their opponents the Sadducees for the crucifixion

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of those eight hundred. They did put several of them to death, and the others felt in such danger of their lives that they sent an embassy to Queen Alexandra, with her younger son, Aristobulus, at their head, requesting that they might be allowed to retire to the frontier fortresses, as after having been faithful to her husband, it was hard not to feel safe at home.

Aristobulus was very rude to his mother on this occasion, and said that these calamities came "through permitting a woman, who against reason was mad with ambition to rule over them, when there were sons in the flower of their age fitter for government." The fact was, he himself was determined to be sovereign, and thought he should be able to manage it without much opposition. He knew the easy-going nature of his brother, and if this request of the Sadducees to be allowed to take charge of the frontier fortresses were granted, he should have friends in all the most important towns in the land. The petition was acceded to, so that Aristobulus thus gained a step in his cherished desire of mounting the throne.

One good piece of work the Pharisees did, that was establishing schools in every moderate-sized town in Judea; and boys were compelled to attend them. The synagogues formed the school buildings. "The world is preserved by the breath of the children," was a favourite maxim of the Pharisees.

The Christian Church has always followed this good example of the Jewish Church, and set herself to educate her children as one of the most important

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of her tasks. Indeed, it is well to remember in this age of state-provided schools the debt of gratitude the country owes to the Church in past days ; for till the eighteenth century she was the only educator of the young, first in the monastic schools, and when they were done away with, in her excellent national schools.

It was in the precincts of Westminster Abbey that Caxton set up his first printing press in England.

After a prosperous reign of nine years, Queen Salome-Alexandra died ; Aristobulus had been waiting and preparing for this event. While she was yet dying, he secured Jerusalem. His friends, the Sadducees, were garrisoning all the frontier towns, and on them he could rely for support.

On his mother's death he at once claimed the government of Judea. An engagement took place between the two brothers, in which Hyrcanus seems to have been defeated. This unambitious prince was quite willing to give up all his power. So at length it was arranged. He received all his revenues, but gave up the high priesthood and sovereignty to his clever, energetic younger brother.

"When they had agreed upon these terms in the Temple, and had confirmed the agreement with oaths, and had given one another their right hands, and embraced one another in the sight of the whole multitude, they departed—the one, Aristobulus, to the palace ; and Hyrcanus, as a private man, to the former house of Aristobulus." This arrangement was a great grief to the Pharisees.

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They sealed their friendship still further by the marriage of the daughter of Hyrcanus to the son of Aristobulus, to whom a daughter was born, named Mariamne, who became the wife of Herod the Great, and "whose sorrows and death made her famous in history."

For the present all seemed settled, and Hyrcanus most likely would have been quite satisfied with his quiet, luxurious life, had it not been for an ambitious friend of his who would not leave him alone. A weak character like Hyrcanus is often drawn to a strong nature, and Antipater, the "half-Jew" or Edomite, was clever and determined. His father had been a trusted officer under Alexander-Jannaeus, and the son had profited well by his experience of court intrigue.

He knew that if Hyrcanus were in his proper position, he himself was certain to be his right hand, the Prime Minister of the realm. Perhaps at first his ambitions did not soar beyond this. He therefore suggested to Hyrcanus that his brother would not be content without taking his life; indeed, that he was actually plotting his death. And in other ways he made insinuations of treachery. Hyrcanus at first utterly refused to listen to them. But continual dropping wears out a stone, and he began to think that it might be true that Aristobulus wished him out of the way, so as to feel more secure in his usurpation.

Antipater at length prevailed on Hyrcanus to go with him to the king of Arabia and get help against his brother. They fled secretly out of Jerusalem

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one night, and by dint of promising the Arabian huge bribes, he consented to help them, and they returned to Jerusalem with an army fifty thousand strong. This was more than Aristobulus dared face, and he shut himself up in the citadel of Jerusalem with the priests, who were mostly aristocratic Sadducees, and so civil war again desolated Judea, and it did not end till Rome had fastened its iron claws into the land, from which it never was freed so long as the rule of the Empire endured.

The majority of the inhabitants sided with Hyrcanus, the Pharisees being always popular with them, so that the siege of the Holy City was pressed on vigorously. The richer families, dreading the horrors of civil warfare, had many of them removed to the Jewish colonies in Egypt, meaning to return when things had quieted down at home.

Meanwhile Hyrcanus, and Antipater, and the king of Arabia, with their mighty forces, encompassed Jerusalem.

"Now there was one, whose name was Onias, a righteous man he was, and beloved of God, who in a certain drought had prayed to God to put an end to the intense heat, and whose prayers God heard, and sent them rain. This man hid himself, because he saw that this sedition would last a great while. However, they brought him to the Jewish camp and desired that as by his prayers he had once put an end to the drought, so he would in like manner make imprecations on Aristobulus and those of his faction."

Needless to say, this servant of God and patriotic

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Jew refused to do any such thing. "And when he was still by the multitude compelled to speak, he stood up in the midst of them, and said, 'O God, the King of the whole world! since those that stand now with me are Thy people, and those that are besieged are also Thy priests, I beseech Thee, that Thou wilt neither hearken to the prayers of those against these, nor bring to effect what these pray against those.' Whereupon such wicked Jews as were about him, as soon as he had made this prayer, stoned him to death." Surely he too, while the cruel stones were being flung, saw the Lord Jesus standing to receive him, "a martyr in a noble cause," as He stood to receive His martyr St. Stephen just a century later.

One other shameful deed is recorded of this army. The Feast of the Passover took place while they were still surrounding the city, and Aristobulus and the priests shut up in the Temple fortress needed animals for sacrifice. Over the wall they shouted to Hyrcanus and the troops, assuring them that if they might have the beasts, they would pay what price they liked, and would let down the money in advance in baskets.

They were required to give the exorbitant sum of one thousand silver shekels for each sacrifice! The money, however, was lowered to the besiegers, who then basely broke their word and refused to give the cattle in exchange. As we read such things, it looks as if truth and honour had departed for ever from the Jews, irreligion, war, treachery and murder being the atmosphere in which they lived. Yet about this

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very time a beautiful collection of hymns were written, called the Psalter of Solomon. This book is full of faith in the coming of the Messiah, in the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, and of eternal rewards and punishments.

It is quite probable that Hyrcanus and Antipater would have overcome Aristobulus by starvation, if in no other way, had not the Romans appeared on the scene and interfered, ordering the king of Arabia to go back to his own country with his soldiers ; and he dared not disobey, but before he reached it, Aristobulus, now free, pursued him with his men, and defeated him, killing Antipater's own brother in the battle.

Shortly afterwards Pompey, the great Roman general, came to Damascus ; this was in the year 63 before Christ. He had "revived the terror of the Roman name in Africa, crushed the most formidable insurrections in Spain and Italy, and had now vanquished the kings of Asia. No personage of such renown and authority had been seen by any Israelite eyes since the meeting of Alexander and the high priest."

Before him came the two rivals for the throne of Judea. See how Roman power was tightening on the Jews when the high priest himself came to submit to her heathen general's decision. Indeed, from this moment, we may consider that Judea was in subjection to Rome, a result of the quarrels, revolutions, and wickedness of her own rulers and people.

Pompey took the part of Hyrcanus the elder,

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though Aristobulus tried to gain his favour by presenting him with a most valuable present of a golden vine costing untold money. On it was the inscription, "The gift of Alexander the king of the Jews." It was eventually deposited in the Temple of the god Jupiter at Rome.

Aristobulus, in his wild rage at losing the kingdom, dared to defy the all-victorious Pompey ; he threw himself once more into the Temple citadel at Jerusalem, whence the Roman general with his splendidly trained soldiers soon followed him, Hyrcanus and Antipater joining with them. But the natural strength of the position baffled the besiegers for three whole months, and at last it was only taken because the Jews were particular about observing the Sabbath. Since the time of Mattathias they had permitted themselves to defend life on that day, but no other work : the Romans, perceiving this, took advantage of it and worked unmolested on the Sabbaths at the earthen bank on which they were going to plant their battering rams. When it was high enough, "the battering engine was brought near, the greatest of the towers was shaken by it, and fell down, and broke down a part of the fortifications ; so the enemy flowed in apace. But now all was slaughter ; some of the Jews being slain by the Romans, and some by one another ; nay, some there were who threw themselves down the precipices, or put fire to their houses and burnt them, as not able to bear the miseries they were under."

The Temple courts were once more the scene of a wholesale massacre. Twelve thousand persons

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are said to have been mowed down on that occasion.

The priests met their death majestically. It was a fast day: they were ordered to desist from their solemn duties; but unheeding the bloodshed all around they went calmly on with the service, till one by one they were all butchered at their posts. This sight attracted the admiration even of Pompey.

Then occurred a sad act of humiliation that was never forgotten. Pompey, with several others of the chief commanders of the army, not content with viewing the Temple courts, mounted the steps and passed on to the Holy Place, and beheld with deep interest the golden candlestick placed there by Judas Maccabeus, the altar of incense, the table of shew-bread, and the rich offerings of the worshippers. Pompey confiscated none of these. But in his insatiable curiosity he went further than even the madness and blasphemy of Antiochus Epiphanes had dared, for he lifted up a corner of the rich, thickly embroidered curtain that separated the holy place from the Holy of Holies, and entered!

Who, and what these Jews worshipped was a question often asked at Rome, and no satisfactory answer had been given. Pompey now wished to see for himself and settle the matter once and for all.

Therefore into that dark, unknown, mysterious chamber, he pushed his way, and with a thrill of intense awe, he found that the worship of the Jews was offered to an invisible, spiritual God!

There was nothing to be seen!

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The following day he allowed the Temple to be cleansed from the defilement his presence had occasioned, and the services to be resumed, and placing Hyrcanus as high priest under the authority of Rome, he departed with his army. They took with them many captives, including Aristobulus and his children.

When Pompey reached Rome a magnificent triumph was accorded him as the hero of so many campaigns. The procession was imposing. "First came the huge placards with the list of the thousand castles and nine hundred cities conquered, the eight hundred galleys taken from the pirates, the thirty-nine cities refounded. Then followed the splendid spoils, then the mass of prisoners, who added a peculiar interest to the procession by appearing, not (according to custom) as slaves in chains, but each in his national costume. Immediately in front of the Conqueror himself, in his gilded car surrounded by pictures of his exploits, came the three hundred and fifty-two captive Princes of the East, and among them, Aristobulus, the King of Judea.

It was the result of the rare humanity of the Conqueror that on reaching the first turn in the Sacred Way, the prisoners were not led to execution, but most of them set free." This was the beginning of that large colony of Jews to be found in Rome in St. Paul's time.

Aristobulus was not among those who had been set at liberty. He had given Pompey too much trouble in that wearisome three months' siege, and he was kept in close custody. Perhaps the famous

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Julius Cæsar himself was at Pompey's triumph. At all events he was in Rome that year. Six years later he was invading the shores of Britain, for our island, like Judea, became in time subject to Rome.

The next step the Romans took was to demand tribute from Judea. This was a bitter trial, shewing as it did, that freedom had really departed from the Jews, and there was a party among them who were always agitating against these taxes. We know how, the last week of our Lord's life on earth, His enemies tried to trap Him into saying something seditious about this very taxation. "Master," they began in their hypocrisy, "we know that Thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest Thou for any man, for Thou regardest not the person of man, Tell us, therefore, what thinkest Thou? Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar (the Roman Emperor) or not?"

If He said, Yes, the patriotic Jews would be offended; if He said, No, He could be accused of rebellion. They thought they had set Him a trap from which He could not extricate Himself. Sin had blinded their eyes so that they could not see that it was "Christ, the Power of God, and the Wisdom of God," with Whom they had to do.

"But Jesus perceived their wickedness and said, 'Why tempt ye Me, ye hypocrites? Show me the tribute money.' And they brought unto Him a penny. And He saith unto them, 'Whose is this image and superscription?' They say unto Him, 'Cæsar's.' Then saith He unto them, 'Render,

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therefore, unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's.' When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left Him, and went their way."

The tribute money mentioned in the seventeenth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, when our Lord bade St. Peter to go fishing, telling him that in the mouth of the first fish he caught he would find a piece of money that would be exactly the right sum to pay the tax for himself and his Master, was not the Roman tribute, but an annual contribution from each Jew to maintain the Temple and its services.

We have read how Joseph collected the taxes formerly in Judea for the king of Egypt, with a large band of soldiers to assist him in extorting the money. The Roman taxes were collected in much the same oppressive fashion. A company of rich Roman nobles bought the privilege of taxing countries for a certain sum, generally for a period of five years. They then sublet the taxing to agents for an increased price. The purchaser would employ the lowest class of persons, for no others would ply the hateful profession of taking money from their own countrymen to give to the foreign conqueror. In the New Testament we find these men called Publicans. "They were universally despised, and called plunderers and beasts of prey"; we cannot wonder at it, for as no definite sum was fixed on for taxing, each collector made a profit for himself out of the unfortunate people who were rated. If the peasants were too poor to pay what was demanded, the publicans lent them money at a large interest, and when that

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ceased to be regularly received, the unfortunate debtors were sold into slavery. We see a picture of this sort of harsh treatment in our Lord's parable of the Unmerciful Servant, who in the street seized his fellow-servant by the throat, and demanded the payment of a small sum he was owed, and because the man did not possess the money, he cast him into prison till he should pay the debt.

To amass the tribute, everything was taxed, houses, land, fruit, merchandise, roads, bridges, etc. ; the yoke was heavy, and made still heavier by the injustice of the publicans. And yet it was one of this detested class, "Zaccheus, the chief among the publicans," who rejoiced the Saviour's heart during His last sad week on earth, by his brave repentant confession. "He was rich," most probably from unjust demands while collecting the revenue, but he had seen the Lord, Jesus had honoured his house with His blessed Presence, and never again could Zacchaeus do those vile, mean things ; resolutely he "stood, and said unto the Lord, Behold, Lord, one half of my goods I give to the poor ; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Yet more wonderful is it to find that one of the Chosen Twelve Apostles, St. Matthew, was Levi the publican, who sat at the receipt of custom on the shores of the Lake of Galilee, and received the tolls

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from its fisheries. He must have often noticed and listened to the Saviour's preaching at Capernaum—and the good seed thus sown bore abundant fruit—for when the Saviour called him with the words, "Follow Me," he instantly obeyed; and to his loving watchfulness and talent the Church received the first written account of the life and labours of the Messiah, the Prophet Who had come to save the world.

CHAPTER XII.

“Look unto the earth; and behold trouble and darkness and dimness of anguish.”

“Come unto Me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Antipater, Governor of Judea—Herod and Phasael, joint Governors of Judea—Antigonus, High Priest—Herod, King of the Jews—Aristobulus III., High Priest: his death—The Fulness of Time—Death of Herod.

JUDEA was stript by Rome of all the possessions she had won, and again sank into an insignificant state. A king no longer reigned over it. The Pharisees rejoiced at this, for they approved of the priestly form of government. A civil governor appointed by the Romans ruled, and Antipater, whose power grew stronger day by day, at last obtained this coveted post. Civil war was raging at Rome meanwhile, but he, with deep worldly wisdom, kept on friendly terms with the victorious party whoever they might be.

Antipater did his best for Judea, but he could not shield it from great misery. The land was overrun by Roman troops, and the taxing was heavy in order to support these huge armies. The inhabitants of several towns in Judea were brutally sold into

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slavery because they were not rich enough to pay the sum demanded from them.

As governor, Antipater promised that this trouble should not occur again, and set his sons and other responsible persons to overlook the gathering of the tribute. The first to bring in the amount he was responsible for, was his son, Herod. This is the Herod who is mentioned in the second chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel ; so we are approaching very near the time of the coming of the Saviour. As a young man, Herod must have been most winning ; handsome, clever, generous, brave, and painstaking, he seemed to be a very loveable character ; none could have dreamt that the brilliant, fascinating youth would have turned into the cruel and atrocious tyrant that he afterwards became.

When almost a boy he had done many daring things in suppressing the fierce robbers, or patriots, for one hardly knows which they were, who infested the wild glens and caverns of Galilee. It was a task full of danger, for the outlaws took refuge in such inaccessible places that it was almost impossible to grapple with them, either from above, or from below. Herod, however, let nothing daunt him. He caused great cradles to be made, which, when filled with soldiers, were let down by windlasses over the face of the cliff, till they reached the openings of the caves. Then ensued desperate fighting, but the brigands were no match for the well-trained soldiers. The most renowned of the robbers, Hezekiah by name, was slain by Herod, with nearly the whole of his gang.

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The news of these exploits reached Jerusalem, where there was always a party of Jews, who were jealous of the power that this Edomite family had gained in Judea, and they persuaded the poor feeble Hyrcanus to summon young Herod to appear before the Sanhedrin (the great Council of the nation), to answer for his conduct in killing these men without a trial by judges first.

Herod obeyed the summons, and stood before the Sanhedrin in gorgeous array, instead of appearing, as was customary when charged as a criminal, in sombre black garments. Instead, he had dressed himself in purple, the royal colour, and put on his richest armour, and more daring than all, had brought a bodyguard of fully armed soldiers with him. Standing haughtily in the midst of the semi-circle of councillors, he completely overawed the Sanhedrin, who did not, as a body, attempt either to question or rebuke him.

One man, however, named Shammai, had the moral courage to reprove Herod. Later on in life, when, among his many wickednesses, Herod slew all the members of the Sanhedrin but two, it must be said to his credit that Shammai, the one who boldly told him of his faults, was spared.

The other one was said by some to be Hillel, a most famous teacher in the law, and it was his son who is supposed to be the holy Simeon, mentioned in the second chapter of St. Luke's Gospel, "Just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Ghost was upon him," who had the great honour of taking the Child Jesus into his arms when

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He came to be presented in the Temple. We sing Simeon's song of thanksgiving every evening in Church, in which he blesses God for having seen the Saviour Who was to be "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel."

Hillel's grandson was the good Gamaliel at whose feet St. Paul sat.

Antipater's career was suddenly put an end to by the foulest treachery. His greatest friend was a man whose very life he had once saved, and yet this wretch, envying Antipater's position, and longing to secure it for himself, bribed a servant when they were both dining with Hyrcanus to put poison in Antipater's goblet of wine. The shameful deed was successful, but the murderer reaped no benefits from his crime, as he died very soon after by the hands of assassins hired by Antipater's sons, Herod and Phasaël, who now became joint governors of Judea. The position of Herod was greatly strengthened by his engaging to marry Mariamne, who was of the Asmonean family, being the granddaughter of both Hyrcanus, the high priest, and Aristobulus, his brother. She was a most beautiful princess, and as good as she was lovely. Herod was deeply attached to her, although the alliance had been arranged out of worldly policy.

Meanwhile, a younger son of Aristobulus, named Antigonus, knowing that many of the Jews greatly disliked an Edomite ruling them, and believing they would welcome him as a member of the Asmonean house, bribed the powerful king of the Parthians to help him to gain possession of Judea. Antigonus

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promised he would give one thousand talents of silver, and five hundred beautiful Jewish women of the best families, if they succeeded in making him ruler. They did bring him to Jerusalem as victor, with Phasael, Herod's brother, and Hyrcanus, the uncle of Antigonus, as prisoners : Herod having fled from the city with his other relations into Idumea or Edom. Antigonus then did a dastardly thing : he cut off the ears of the aged Hyrcanus, so as to prevent him ever again officiating as high priest ; for the Law of Moses enacts that priests must be without blemish. Phasael he condemned to death, but before the sentence could be carried out he dashed his brains out against the stone walls of his prison.

Herod, having left all his womankind in safety, hurried off to Rome to plead his case before the senate. This he did so cleverly, and promised so much money, a bait the Romans could rarely withstand, that he succeeded in gaining favours beyond his wildest expectations.

The Roman senate pronounced Antigonus their enemy, not only because of his former opposition to them, but because he had now set aside their authority, and taken the government by the help of the Parthians. They then appointed Herod king of the Jews !

Out of the senate house he walked between the two most powerful men of the Empire, Antony and Cæsar, and with them he went up to the heathen temple to offer sacrifices. He was only half Jew by birth, and even less by faith.

But though proclaimed king, Herod had to win

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his way by force of arms, and the first thing therefore he had to do was to collect troops. It was three whole years before he could claim his kingdom. Helped by the Roman soldiers, at last he captured Jerusalem, but only after a deluge of blood. The army, enraged because of the long time the siege had lasted, gave no quarter. The Jews were furious at being conquered by the hated Romans, and at having a more than half heathen king placed over them. Herod's fierce helpers "committed murders continually in the narrow streets, and in the houses by crowds, and as they were flying to the temple for shelter ; and there was no pity taken of either infants or the aged, nor did they spare so much as the weaker sex."

All this carnage vexed Herod greatly ; he felt truly that it was not the way to endear a nation to its ruler, and he bitterly asked the Roman commander if he was going to empty the city both of money and men, and leave him king of a desert. The general replied that the soldiers must be permitted to plunder after undergoing the hardships of the campaign. Herod then in despair promised every soldier and commander a handsome present from his own money if they would desist from their work of destruction, and by this means he eventually got rid of them.

The last scene of the life of Antigonus is unworthy of the Asmonean line : evidently his spirit was broken with the tremendous disaster, and in an agony of tears he came crouching at the Roman general's feet, praying for his life. The latter

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spurned him and "insulted him beyond measure, and called him Antigona (namely, a woman, not a man), yet did he not treat him as if he were a woman by letting him go out at liberty, but put him into bonds, and kept him in close custody."

Eventually he was taken to Antioch, where the poor timid prisoner met with a terrible death, being first tied to a stake and scourged, and then beheaded like a common criminal. Those were cruel times in which to live.

It is said Antigonus lost his life by the express wish of Herod, who paid the Romans a large sum of money to have him put out of the way.

Thus ended the reign of the Amoneans after it had lasted a century and a quarter—ended through their own dissensions and unworthiness.

Now began a reign of terror in Jerusalem for all those who had sided with Antigonus. The whole Sanhedrin, save two of its members, were massacred, and thus perished the Jewish nobility. Their estates were confiscated by Herod. In the new Sanhedrin Pharisee and Sadducee sat side by side, their divisions being thus far made up in the presence of a common danger from a heathenish king. He, however, had his admirers, who formed a third party in Judea, and were called Herodians. We read of them in the New Testament. In fact, under Herod's iron rule, which put an end to all rebellions and tumults, the country and commerce flourished. He was a great architect, and beautified Jerusalem and other cities; and his generosity was unbounded.

He and his father owed all to Rome, and therefore

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he naturally, and with great worldly wisdom, was foremost in furthering her interests in every way. But this was an additional reason for hatred in the eyes of every true Jew, and joined to the fact that he was an Edomite, and ruled over them only by the overthrow of the beloved Armonean family, was enough to prevent him ever gaining the affection of his subjects throughout his long and brilliant reign.

A high priest he had to find, not being himself of the tribe of Levi, and he secured one called Ananiel. This was more than Maramne's mother could bear, for, besides her lovely daughter who became Herod's wife while he was besieging Jerusalem, she had a son called Aristobulus, also famed for his marvellous beauty, and he by rights ought to have been made high priest, since his grandfather, Hyrcanus, was now disqualified. She never ceased plotting and scheming for this, till at last Herod thought the wisest plan would be to yield to her wishes ; and he removed Ananiel, and allowed his young brother-in-law, Aristobulus III., to have the exalted office. Herod had no business to appoint a high priest at all, but when once put in the high priesthood, Ananiel ought to have remained there for the rest of his life ; but power had passed away from the Jews, and henceforth high priests were nominated and deposed just as their rulers fancied.

Aristobulus III. appeared for the first time as the high priest of the Jews at the Feast of Tabernacles in the year 35 before Christ. When the people saw the handsome boy, tall and stately-looking, in the rich

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robes and mitre of his sacred office, and performing his solemn duties with grace and reverence, their joy was unbounded. Was he not one of their very own Asmonean family?

Their hearty acclamations of admiration, and the congratulations among themselves on the appointment of Aristobulus as high priest, were noted by Herod with anxiety and jealousy. While this heir of the royal family was alive, he felt sure he would never win his people's loyalty. Utterly irreligious as he was, he stopped at no crime, and from that very Feast of Tabernacles the doom of the poor lad was sealed.

Herod and the Court soon removed to the fine new palace that had been built near Jericho, and one hot evening when Aristobulus was bathing with some of the royal bodyguard in a fish-pond in the grounds, the young high priest was first, seemingly in fun, dipped under the water, and as the sudden sunset darkened the Eastern sky, was held down forcibly till life was extinct.

The report was given out that Aristobulus had been accidentally drowned, but all in the palace knew, though none dared to say it aloud, how, and why it happened: all save the noble Mariamne, who refused to credit her husband with such an appalling crime. Herod himself did much to disarm suspicion, for when he looked on the dead boy's face with its wonderful beauty still undimmed, he burst into tears. And he ordered a magnificent funeral.

Happy was Aristobulus at being thus taken away from the evil to come. Herod was incited to murder

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after murder by the intrigues of his sister Salome, one of the wickedest women that ever lived. The poor old high priest, Hyrcanus, who had already suffered the mutilation of both ears, the greatest friend of Herod's father, and grandfather of the wife he so passionately loved, was one of the victims, being put to death when he was eighty years old.

Then came the turn of the beautiful Mariamne herself, Herod's true and loyal wife. Salome poisoned his mind against her, accusing her of unfaithfulness, and she was led forth to die in all her innocence and dazzling loveliness. Never had she wronged him or joined in the plots and wickedness around her. With perfect dignity she met her cruel fate, a worthy descendant of Mattathias and Judas Maccabeus.

Two of her grandchildren are mentioned in the New Testament. Herod Agrippa, who "killed James, the brother of John, with the sword," and who imprisoned St. Peter; he shortly afterwards died an awful death, when in his robe of silver at Cæsarea, he allowed the people to call him God without rebuking them: and the other was Herodias, of evil fame, through whom John the Baptist was beheaded.

Herod's remorse for this wife's execution was instantaneous. In agony he called her name again and again, and a maddening longing for her took possession of him. He even gave orders to his servants to address her as if she were still present and could answer them. After which, it is not

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surprising to read, that a burning fever attacked him, and he lay between life and death.

Alas! he only recovered to slay Mariamne's mother, three of his own sons, besides hundreds of less note : among all this stupendous bloodshed the murder of the Holy Innocents, a score or so of babes in the little city of Bethlehem, would pass almost unnoticed.

To still his agonized conscience, and to ingratiate himself with his people, he determined to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem on a magnificent scale. He had to beware how he set about this, as the Jews completely distrusted him, knowing that in other parts of the kingdom he had built idol temples. Indeed, he had to do his work outside Zerubbabel's Temple, not a stone of which dared he displace till the new one was advanced enough to be used ; Divine Service was thus not interrupted for one day.

He made careful preparations so as not to wound the susceptibilities of the most particular Pharisee ; he even had a thousand priests instructed in masonry and carpentry, so that none but holy hands might build the sacred sanctuary. It was ready for opening in about ten years, but not really finished for a long time after that. The Jews told our Lord " thirty and six years was this Temple in building."

Though hating their ruler, the Jews were very proud of the Temple he had erected. The Lord's words must have struck like a knell on the disciples' ears, when He replied to their remark on the beautiful white marble of which it was composed, " Seest thou

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these great buildings? There shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down." Thirty-seven years later this saying was exactly fulfilled when the Romans destroyed the city and Temple.

One act only of Herod the Great's was truly appreciated by his subjects. During a terrible famine and pestilence he employed all the many talents he undoubtedly possessed to alleviate the sufferings of his own people and of the surrounding countries. He sent for enormous supplies of corn from Egypt, selling the rich furniture of his palace, and his gold and silver vessels to pay for it, and he then gave the seed lavishly away. He clothed whole villages and towns where the poor stricken people needed all the necessities of life. No man spent more, or worked harder than Herod did, in those two direful years in relieving the widespread suffering, so that the Jews were ready to forget and forgive much.

Unfortunately, as age crept on, Herod grew less tactful with his subjects, who, at the best, were always difficult to manage. His greatest cause of offence was placing a golden eagle, the symbol of Roman power, among the decorations on the front of the Temple. This exasperated the Jews almost beyond bounds.

When Herod was in his last illness and supposed to be at death's door, two eminent rabbis instilled into the minds of their students the desire to destroy this hateful symbol and purge the House of God from such a pollution. When a rumour got circulated that the tyrant had died at Jericho, a

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company of these high-spirited young Pharisees tore the eagle down. Herod was still lingering, and on the news being brought to him of this outrage, he had the two rabbis and a number of the young men burnt at the stake; the martyrs receiving intense sympathy and pity from the people.

In the midst of these scenes of sorrow "God sent forth His Son. The Prophet that should come into the world." Darkness was covering the earth and gross darkness the people, and the universal corruption of the world cried aloud for that Saviour Who alone could cleanse and bring salvation and hope.

The great Augustus Cæsar reigned over all known lands, and the Roman rule just then held all nations in unwonted peace.

"No war, or battles sound,
Was heard the world around;
The idle spear and shield were high up hung,
The hook'd chariot stood,
Unstained with hostile blood;
And kings sat still with awful eye,
As if they surely knew their sovran Lord was by."

Into this hush the Prince of Peace was born. The world's dire need, the widespread Roman dominion, and the universal Greek language prepared the way for the preaching and reception of the Gospel; and we may reverently believe that these were some of the conditions which constituted God's "fulness of time." Then came True Light that men should no longer walk in darkness but have the light of life.

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Sinful souls bowing beneath their burdens, and sad ones perplexed and doubtful about all things, and faithful patient souls feeling the stress of the struggle of service, have through all the ages since lifted their eyes with hope and rest and joy to that Light, and sung their surprise, their relief, and justified confidence almost in the prophets words of old, "Lo this is our God, we have waited for Him and He will save us ; this is the Lord, we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His Salvation."

It was very near the close of Herod's life when he heard from the lips of the Wise Men that there was One born King of the Jews, no hated Edomite or foreigner. We can well imagine his rage at the news, he who had been so careful to murder every rival to the throne in order that his family alone might possess the dignity. Therefore, "he sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coast thereof, from two years old and under."

His loathsome illness caused him intense suffering and he knew there was no one who really loved and sympathized with him. In his agony of mind and body, he determined that tears should be shed at his death, whether he was loved or no ; so he gave orders for a number of the principal inhabitants of Jerusalem to be imprisoned, and the moment the breath left his body they were to be massacred to a man, but even that "she-wolf," his sister Salome, dared not carry this plan out, but released them.

His funeral was magnificent, a tremendous

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procession of pomp and wealth, but without a single mourner.

On Herod's death, his kingdom was divided among his four sons.

· Archelaus, a man even more wicked than his father, reigned over Judea. So cruel was he, that after eight years' rule he was expelled to far-off France, and Judea came then under the direct control of Roman Governors. St. Joseph, we read in the second chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, was afraid to settle in Bethlehem with the Virgin and Holy Child, when he found Archelaus was reigning in the room of his father Herod: "notwithstanding being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee, and he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth." Here Herod Antipas ruled; he was very wicked too, as we read in the fourteenth chapter of the same Gospel, but not so actively cruel as his brother.

In Nazareth "the Child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him."

" ' That glorious Form, that light insufferable,
And that far-beaming blaze of majesty
Wherewith He went at Heaven's high council-table
To sit the midst of Trinal Unity,
He laid aside; and here with us to be,
Forsook the courts of everlasting day,
And chose with us a darksome house of mortal clay.' "

"And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death,

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even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a Name which is above every name ; that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth ; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

THE END.

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